

VOL. 268 NO. 6

DECEMBER 1991

The Atlantic

NICHOLAS LEMANN: THE OTHER UNDERCLASS / CORBY KUMMER ON PORT

POW

The POW/MIA Myth

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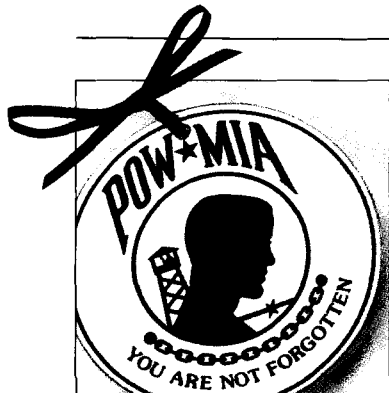
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"THAT WOMAN" VERSUS THE CHATTERING CLASSES
Of all the opposition Margaret Thatcher faced as Great Britain's Prime Minister, the bitterest came from liberals, academics, artists, writers, and the media. She was a threat, the author argues, to their complacent snobbery.
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45 THE POW/MIA MYTH

Every year the United States government officially declares that it is operating "on the assumption that at least some Americans are held captive" in the jungles of Southeast Asia—prisoners since the days of the Vietnam War. Polls suggest that most Americans also believe that POWs are still being held. And Hollywood has powerfully reinforced this belief. But a careful review of the evidence, the author contends, shows that it is groundless—a myth created and exploited for political reasons.

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96 THE OTHER UNDERCLASS

Puerto Ricans are the worst-off ethnic group in the United States—a situation that can be understood in two completely different ways: either as an aspect of the problem of entrenched inner-city poverty or as a by-product of the long, steady emergence of the island of Puerto Rico from the Third World.

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*Cover illustration by
Ivan Chermayeff*



AS LONG AS THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO
WON'T MAKE A GOOD CHOICE WHEN IT'S
POSSIBLE TO MAKE A GREAT ONE ...

There will always be a
CHIVAS REGAL.



745 BOYLSTON STREET

WITH THIS ISSUE, containing his article "The Other Underclass," Nicholas Lemann begins his ninth year as a writer for *The Atlantic Monthly*. During much of the past year he has been hearing reaction to and praise for his latest book, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*. Editorial writers, scholars, and politicians have extolled its importance and elegance.

The Promised Land grew out of several memorable articles Lemann wrote for *The Atlantic*. By the time he arrived, not yet thirty years old, he had spent eight years as a writer and editor for *The Washington Monthly*, *The Washington Post*, and *Texas Monthly*. His work has been wide-ranging: a profile of a Texas tycoon, a book essay on American photography, a depiction of life in a mining town when boom turned to bust. What has connected all of this varied subject matter is a concern that is also among the central purposes of this magazine: chronicling and evaluating the deeper changes in American life and culture.

Lemann's work has been unified in another way, too: by his experimentation with *how* a story should be told. When

he was growing up, in New Orleans in the late 1960s, Lemann avidly followed the magazine world's debates about "the New Journalism" and "the nonfiction novel." These were attempts to open up nonfiction writing by making greater use of narrative techniques. Now, Lemann says, the challenge is to use narrative to serve analytic purposes—as in his *Atlantic* profile of Caspar Weinberger (October, 1984).

In telling the story of Weinberger's conversion from "Cap the Knife," as budget director, to "Cap the Shovel," as Secretary of Defense, Lemann also examined how the Reagan defense buildup affected America.

Lemann got his first professional writing assignment when he was in high school, and he got his first magazine job two weeks after he graduated from Harvard. "I remember reading all these magazines when I was seventeen and thinking, This is it! This is what I want to do!" Lemann says. "I worry a little bit that nearly twenty years later I'm still doing the same thing, and enjoying it so much. At the age when journalists are supposed to start burning out, I wonder if there's something wrong with me—maybe a case of arrested development." Or accelerated.

—THE EDITORS



MARTIN CORNIEL

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JAMES FALLOWS ("Remember Pearl Harbor How?") is *The Atlantic's* Washington editor and the author of *National Defense* (1981) and *More Like Us* (1989). Fallows is writing a book about the future of East Asia.

H. BRUCE FRANKLIN ("The POW/MIA Myth") is the John Cotton Dana Professor of English and American Studies at Rutgers University, Newark. He is the author of numerous books, including *War*

Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination (1988) and *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (1989). Franklin's article in this issue of *The Atlantic* is drawn from his book *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America*, to be published by Lawrence Hill Books next spring.

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enue Service") is the author of numerous books, including *The Kite That Braved Old Orchard Beach* (1991).

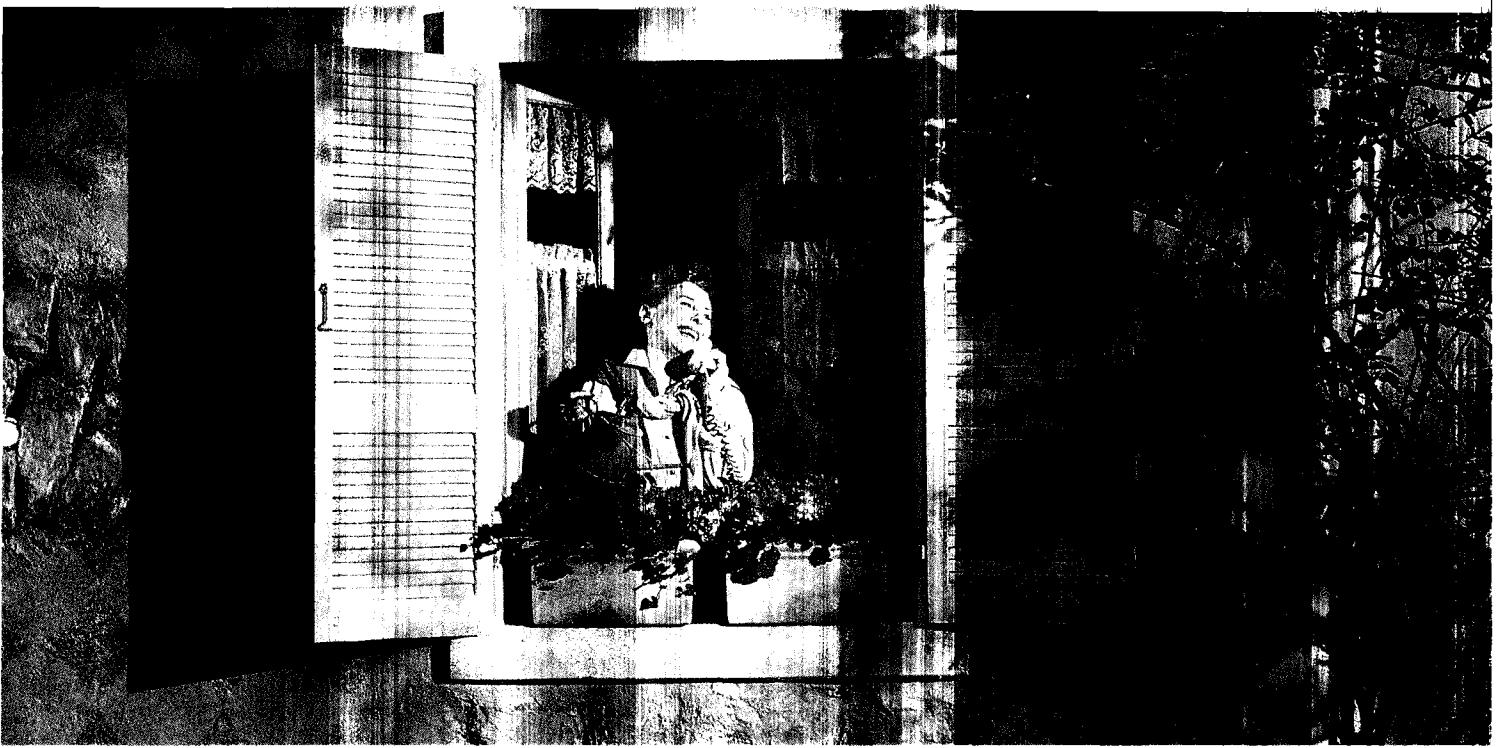
NICHOLAS LEMANN ("The Other Underclass") is a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*.

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The December Almanac was compiled with the assistance of Gail Cleere, on behalf of the U.S. Naval Observatory; Frank Garland, M.D., of the University of California at San Diego; and Jo Paolletti, of the University of Maryland.



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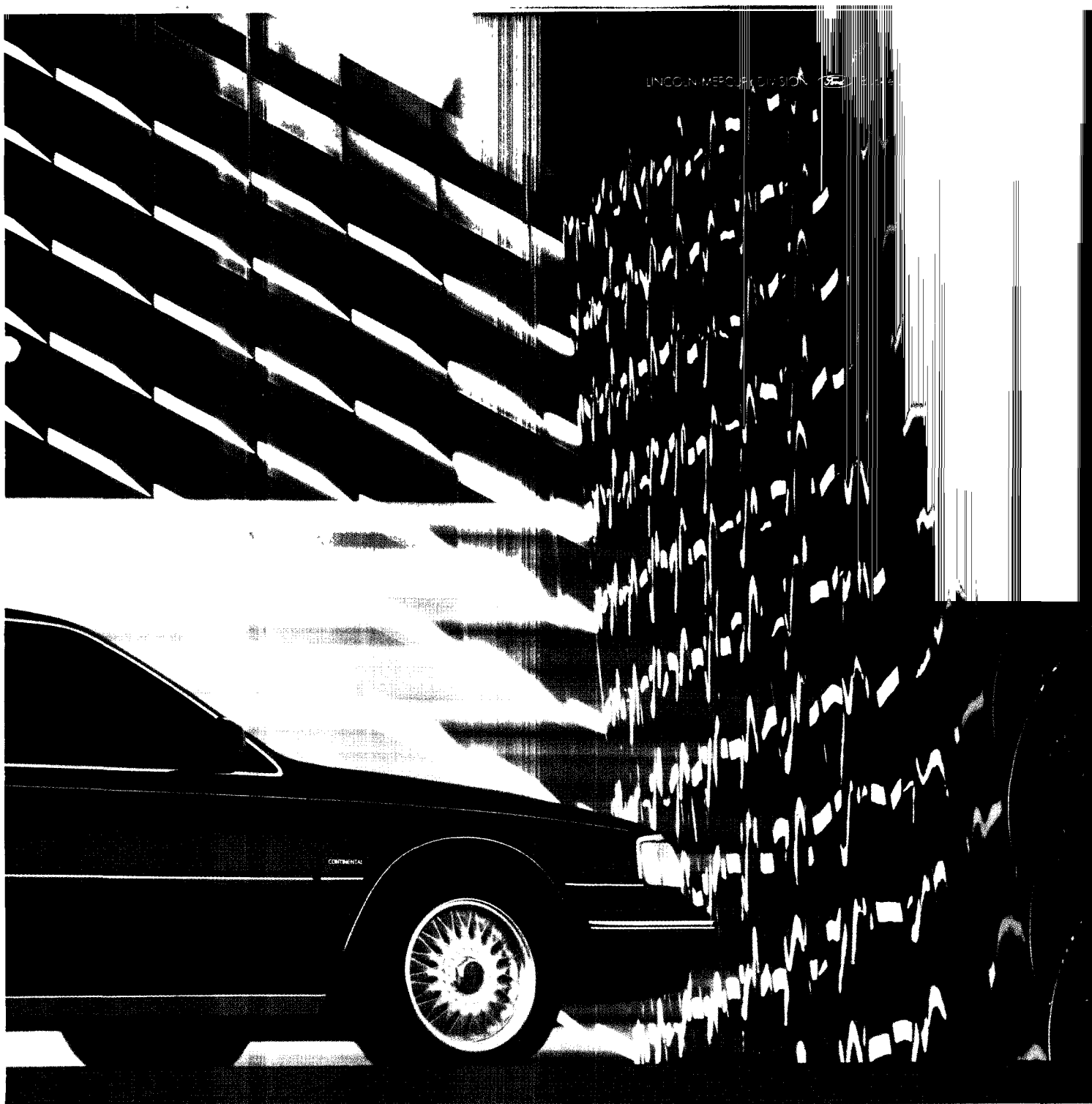
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



PRAIRYERTH

William Least Heat-Moon's appreciation of places and people in Chase County, Kansas ("PrairyErth," September *Atlantic*), was a sensitive, absorbing account of an area that many travelers would consider only as miles to be put behind them on their way to somewhere else. Having enjoyed it so much, I can more easily indulge in a bit of petty quibbling with the author.

In writing about Linda Thurston's search for a name for her Emma Chase Café, he says that she was "unsatisfied by or unaware of the facts, such as those of 1889 about Minnie Morgan, of Cottonwood, one of the first women in the country to be elected mayor and the first—and probably the only one—to serve with an all-female city council." The female mayor of Cottonwood Falls was neither the first nor the only mayor to have an all-female council.

In 1888 the town of Oskaloosa, in Jefferson County, Kansas, elected Mary D. Lowman mayor, along with an all-female council that included my grandfather's sister, Hannah P. (King) Morse. I feel sure that neither Mr. Trogdon nor his alter ego, Mr. Heat-Moon, will take umbrage at this slight correction from a pleased reader.

FRANK E. DUBACH
Colorado Springs, Colo.

Probably dozens of Kansans will compliment you and William Least Heat-Moon on his fine study of Chase County, as do I.

But there are a couple of boners:

The photo caption on page 50 reads "Along the Madison-Eureka Road, southeastern Chase County." If you examine the highway map, you will find that that road does not touch Chase County but remains in Greenwood County.

Regarding the sentence "I am driving . . . [along] the course of the two-mile-wide and east-running Cottonwood River. . . ." The Cottonwood

River may in flood times stretch quite wide, but west of Emporia it's more like 200 (not 10,000) feet wide!

WILLIAM FRISON
Richmond, Ind.

The interesting, enjoyable—and disturbing—article by William Least Heat-Moon contains the assertion that in 1902 "the federal government, encouraged by Vice President Charles Curtis and other Kaw mixed-bloods, forced allotment onto the people. . . . Eighth-blood Curtis, once a real-estate developer, . . . saw to it that he and his sixteenth-blood children got nice parcels of tribal land at the expense of poor full-bloods."

I believe that Charles Curtis (1860–1936) was one-fourth Indian, on his mother's side. I do not know whether he was a real-estate developer; he was a prosecuting attorney in Kansas, and served in Congress from 1893 to 1907. Hence in 1902 he was a congressman, and the vice presidency was vacant. Theodore Roosevelt had become President in September of 1901, after the assassination of William McKinley, and next in the line of succession would have been the speaker of the House.

Curtis went on to serve in the Senate from 1907 to 1913, and again in 1915 to 1929. He became Vice President under Herbert Hoover. To the best of my knowledge he never married, and had no descendants who "got nice parcels of tribal land at the expense of poor full-bloods." His official hostess in Washington during his vice presidency was his sister, Dolly Gann, and I seem to remember a well-publicized rivalry between Mrs. Gann and Mrs. Nicholas (Alice Roosevelt) Longworth, the wife of the speaker, over which of them had social precedence.

A number of aspects of this story seem to me confusing; it would be good to have them clarified.

THOMAS CURTIS
Elyria, Ohio

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SAKS FIFTH AVENUE



William Least Heat-Moon says that he has not discovered why the village of Saffordville, Kansas, was formerly named Kenyon. I suggest that the village was named for Kenyon College, for the following reason.

Salmon P. Chase—for whom, the author states, the county is named—was the nephew of Philander Chase, the first bishop of Ohio of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the founder of Kenyon College (1824), the bishop of Illinois (1835–1852), and the founder of the now-defunct Jubilee College. When Salmon Chase was a young man of college age, he lived with and was guided by his uncle Philander.

Kenyon College was named for Lord George Kenyon (1776–1855), who was one of the British donors to the college. The Chase and Kenyon names are now irrevocably linked.

JAMI E. PEELLE
*Olin Library of Kenyon College
Gambier, Ohio*

In his very fine article on Chase County, Kansas, William Least Heat-Moon writes, “You’ll run out of Route 50 only on the Embarcadero, along San Francisco Bay. . . .” Unfortunately this is no longer the case. Since the 1960s U.S. Route 50 has stopped in Sacramento, not San Francisco, meaning that it is no longer truly a coast-to-coast highway. The road’s eastern terminus is here in Ocean City, Maryland, where a sign marks the distance to the other end: SACRAMENTO 3,073.

JIM LILLIEFORS
Ocean City, Md.

William Least Heat-Moon replies:

I am glad to learn from Frank Dubach of progressive thinking in Oskaloosa in 1888.

The sentence William Frison refers to should have read, “. . . the two-mile-wide . . . Cottonwood River valley.”

In regard to Thomas Curtis’s letter: I should have spoken of Charles Curtis as a “future Vice President.” For his other queries, I refer him to *Kansas History*, Spring 1982, page 63:

Charles Curtis (1860–1936), Kansas congressman and senator, and vice-president during the Hoover administration, was an eighth-blood Caw who had never resided on the Indian territory reserve. A member of the powerful house committee on Indian Affairs, Curtis sponsored the Cur-

tis act of 1898 and was largely responsible for the passage of the Caw allotment act of 1902. For his efforts, Congressman Curtis and his three children received approximately 1,625 acres of allotment and surplus land.

I thank Jami Peelle for the intriguing facts, but I’m still unable to link them conclusively with Kansas, since Salmon Chase never set foot or showed much interest in “his” county. I have no evidence that the founders of Kenyon, Kansas, now Saffordville, knew anything about Salmon Chase or Lord George Kenyon—but they did know a Kenyon family in Emporia.

Jim Lilliefors, who is writing a book about the much-neglected U.S. 50, is correct, although the route from Sacramento to the Embarcadero still exists, as Interstate 80.

REASSESSING LBJ

David M. Kennedy’s review of Robert Dallek’s *Lone Star Rising* (“A Fairer Likeness,” September *Atlantic*) suffers from a contextual escape route from historical reality into rationalization. Kennedy believes Dallek’s work to be more meritorious than Robert Caro’s because Dallek seeks to place Johnson in a “full historical context” and recognizes Johnson’s “stupefyingly complex character.”

After acknowledging Johnson’s probably illegal election in 1948, Kennedy engages in a lengthy account of Coke Stevenson’s crimes and misdemeanors, and the unsavory political philosophy of groups antithetical to Johnson and not to Kennedy’s liking (or mine, for that matter), as an apology for Johnson’s felonious conduct. All this does not, however, excuse or exonerate Johnson’s crimes, and is entirely irrelevant to evaluating Johnson’s lawlessness. It reminds me of the bankrupt argument that women who wear short skirts are inviting rape.

“Contextual” historicizing of Johnson’s conduct serves only to obscure its basic criminal nature. Moreover, excusing crime by the subterfuge of contextualization works only (and Kennedy misses this small point completely), if at all, when the subject’s conduct was legal at the time. One can argue, for example, that Thomas Jefferson’s ownership of slaves was understand-

able in the context of Colonial America, but may do so only because it was legal circa 1800. (Of course, the evil of slave ownership has come with the passage of time to be considered by many as so monstrous as to be inexcusable in any context, no matter how “legal.”)

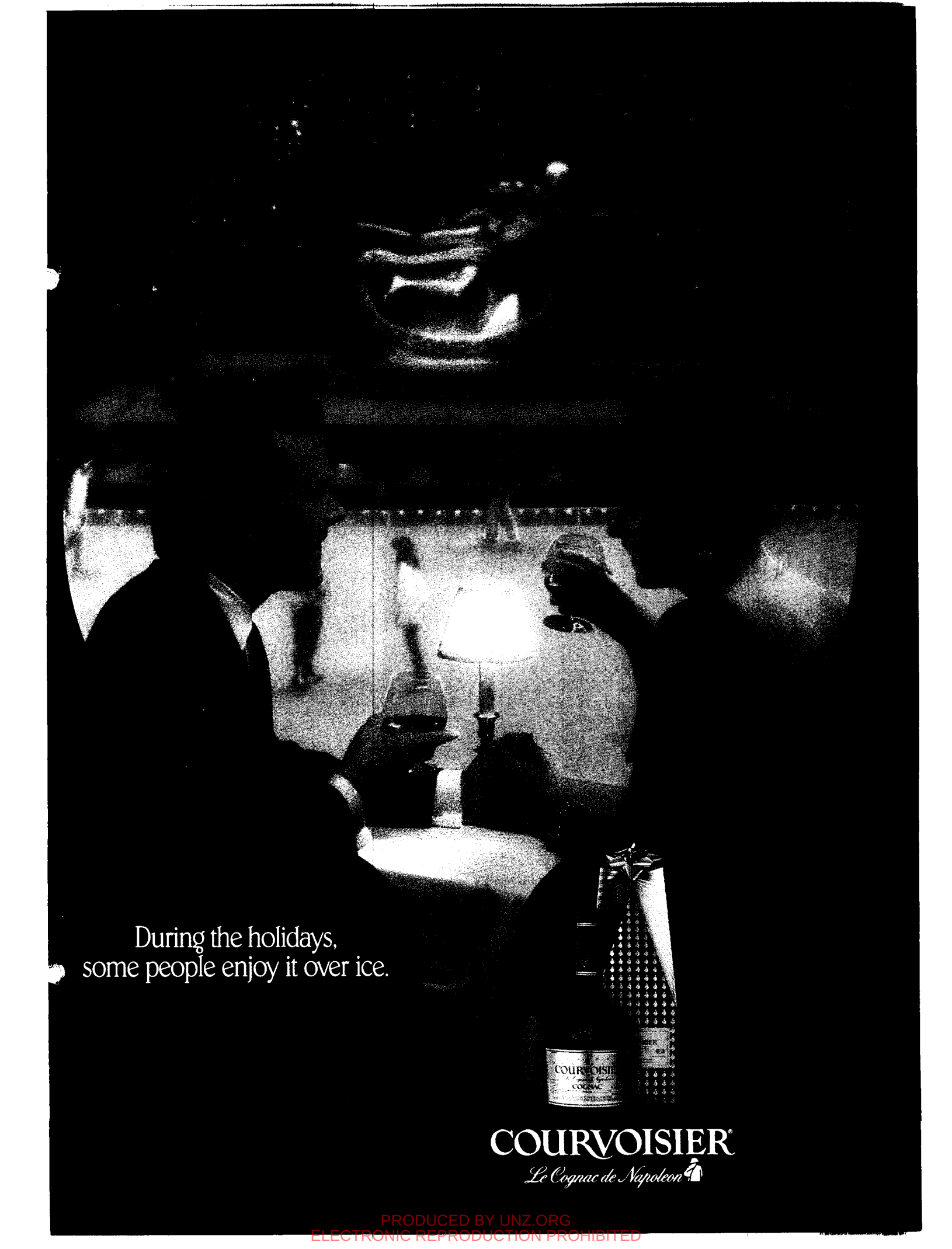
Johnson’s election fraud was never legal, and to argue that it is more reasonably understood in some ambiguously defined historical context is to lose one’s moral bearings completely. It is to suggest to the next generation of Americans—about whom, Kennedy asserts, Johnson was intensely concerned—that if you can imagine a self-serving reason for an election crime, why then go ahead and commit it; just don’t get caught, and forty years from now we will find a way to explain it away contextually.

Kennedy’s understanding of Dallek’s “understanding,” “that political survival in Texas may have necessitated dirty tricks,” is also out of touch with present-day American attitudes (and probably American attitudes in the 1940s), not to mention the American Constitution, toward politicians who commit crimes to gain or remain in office. Proof of this is evident from the public’s total disapproval of Richard Nixon’s dirty tricks and its demand that he resign the office of President. Kennedy may be prepared to forgive crimes because of their contextual occurrence; the American people obviously do not share his contempt for the law.

JAMES F. JOHNSON
San Francisco, Calif.

David Kennedy’s review of Robert Dallek’s biography (including his attack on Robert Caro’s biography) of Lyndon Johnson provides an excellent example of how historians sometimes confuse their obligation to disinterested analysis with their eagerness to polish the reputations of political leaders with whom they share a political orthodoxy. This is nineteenth-century Whig historiography with a twist.

Kennedy thinks that Caro has been too hard on LBJ. He praises Dallek for softening LBJ’s ruthlessness and lawlessness by presenting his subject in the “full historical context.” But here Kennedy is using the language of the disinterested historian to mask a sympathetic historical judgment based on a political allegiance. In this case “full



During the holidays,
some people enjoy it over ice.

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historical context” means praise for LBJ’s domestic politics.

Alas, this effort to rescue the politics by rescuing the politician can lead to blatant hypocrisy. Kennedy praises Dallek because he “understands that political survival in Texas may have necessitated dirty tricks.” This explanation has an eerily Nixonian ring to it—though I think it would be safe to say that Kennedy would not write for *The Atlantic* in an attempt to give Nixon the benefit of the “full historical context.” Such special protection is reserved for those who share Kennedy’s political outlook.

All this might be nothing more than another annoying example of the liberal double standard, if it were not for the fact that a distinguished historian has exercised it. Discovering the truth about LBJ may in fact require more than mere disgust at his character and political tactics. But when serious historians seek to trade polemical punches with popular biographers, they risk a slide down the slippery slope of irrelevancy.

W. JON ESCHER
Northwood, N.H.

David M. Kennedy replies:

I am mystified at James Johnson’s allegation that I try to “excuse or exonerate Johnson’s crimes,” since I said plainly that Johnson acted “illegally” in the 1948 senatorial election, and referred to that behavior later in my review as “unsavory” and as indicative of Johnson’s capacity for “villainy” and of the “malignancies of Johnson’s . . . character.”

W. Jon Escher holds me up to the impossible standard of failing to write simultaneously a review of Robert Dallek’s book and an appraisal of Richard Nixon’s career. I’d suggest that he hold his fire until he sees my views on Mr. Nixon in print. That would be the time to judge whether or not I’m guilty of invoking “the liberal double standard”—or any other species of double standard, for that matter.

Both Messrs. Johnson and Escher accuse me (and, by extension, Robert Dallek) of arguing that “*tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner*.” But, as so often happens, that accusation originates in the confusion of the historical and moral realms. The tribunal of history is not the same as the bar of justice, and historians aren’t in the same business as

prosecutors and judges. That distinction seems to escape Messrs. Johnson and Escher, and also seems to have eluded Robert Caro, whose relentless judgmentalism is in the last analysis an obstacle to rounded historical understanding.

But to insist that history has a wider analytic orbit than jurisprudence or even ethics is emphatically not to shift the grounds of argument from the moral to the “contextual.” It is, rather, to *expand* the terms of discussion, and to confront the complex and often paradoxical fact that villains as well as heroes make history. I am not prepared, as Mr. Johnson alleges, “to forgive crimes because of their contextual occurrence.” But I do insist that historical analysis should not come to a magisterial halt when moral judgment has been rendered. Focusing exclusively on LBJ’s moral rectitude yields precious little understanding of the far-reaching consequences of his actions. And consequences, above all, are the principal focus of historical judgment.

HOLISTIC BRIDGE THERAPY

Pinciples of Holistic Medicine Applied to Infrastructure Maintenance: A Test Case” is the funniest piece of writing I have read in five years,¹ and I am now forced to deny similar previous claims I have made about the works of P. McManus, D. Barry, R. Blount, and P. J. O’Rourke.²

¹“I Can’t Read When You’re Laughing So Loud, Mom,” *History of the Marsh Family*, Vol. XHAA, pg. 91.

²See minutes of the Memory Lane Book Club, 1987–1990.

MARGOT MARSH
Tacoma, Wash.

Out here in California we’ve been using holistic therapy on our bridges for years. We’re now applying it to our furniture and major household appliances.

MARK BEAUCHAMP
Fullerton, Calif.

Fred Catapano extends to ailing bridges venerable holistic health practices previously applied only to animate forms. He has thus violated traditional separation of two disciplines, one purporting “to heal,” the other “to repair.” As pointed out long

ago by Spillway et al.¹, “There can be no convergence in such matters. . . .”

A holistic practitioner myself, I take great umbrage at Catapano’s even suggesting that the Williamsburg Bridge exhibits harmonics remotely similar to that of human beings. If a bridge—any bridge—has such a property, it exists solely from human engenderment. An example is the well-known phenomenon of bridge sway (even collapse) when a group of soldiers march in step over it. The legend of the Lost Battalion of Smolenski (A.D. 3) exemplifies this type of event and gives historical perspective to my view that Catapano is way off base on this one.

¹Damate Spillway et al., “A Refutation of Hypotheses Attributing Healing Potential to Inanimate Objects,” *J. Irreproducible Results*, 2:29-38, December, 1979.

RONALD J. LANDRY
Camarillo, Calif.

Iwould like to point out that in footnote 17 of Fred Catapano’s otherwise noteworthy article Brigham Young University Press is located in Salt Lake City. It is actually in Provo.

A small thing, perhaps, but speaking of “enhanced self-esteem,” it could be important.

JAMES B. FINN
St. Louis, Mo.

Fred Catapano replies:

Mark Beauchamp’s thinly veiled arrogance is a classic example of the goody-goody California-style jingoism masquerading as kindness that throws flies in the face of holism and makes humor out of mockery.

Kudos to Ronald J. Landry for plumbing new depths in holistic anagrammatization. He recognized (as few readers did) that if you take the “umbrage” out of “Williamsburg” (and forgive the spurious *e*) you end up with (Wallace) *Willis*, one of the piece’s apocryphal researchers.

Margot Marsh seems to be right on the money—as, alas, does James Finn.

DECIPHERING ANCIENT MAYA

The Decipherment of Ancient Maya” (September *Atlantic*) is flawed from beginning to end, because David Roberts is not familiar with the history and processes of the decipherment of scripts.



The problems begin with the title: among those anthropologists who distinguish *Maya* from *Mayan*, the former is used for all aspects of the culture except the language name; the language is always called Mayan.

It is incorrect to say that "a century's toil produced almost nothing in the way of useful translation," unless the understanding of the enormously complex calendar counts as "almost nothing"; probably the majority of Maya glyphs in any inscription are elements of the dating.

It is incorrect to say that only in the years since 1960 has decipherment begun "in earnest"; Roberts himself lists the accomplishments of Knorosov, Berlin, and Proskouriakoff, all before that year, which composed the key to the decipherment.

It is incorrect to say that in 1822 Champollion "stumbled on" the key to decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs. From boyhood he had prepared himself for the task, studying all the ancient languages that were available to him; at the age of sixteen he presented a paper to the learned society of Grenoble suggesting that Coptic was the language of ancient Egypt (it is now known to be a direct descendant). It was not Champollion who recognized that the hieroglyphs "were in large part phonetic"; that was seen by the Englishman Thomas Young, who, however, misinterpreted the nature of the phoneticism. Champollion built upon his work. It was not Champollion who "suspected" that the Rosetta Stone displayed parallel texts in Greek and Egyptian; that was obvious to all who glanced at the stone. Champollion's insights were two, and were sub-

tle: he recognized that the hieroglyphs could represent phonetically not just Greek names but Egyptian names and ordinary words as well; and he showed that the words discovered by applying phonetic values discovered from known kings' and others' names could be interpreted by means of Coptic. He also discovered that many of the hieroglyphs did indeed have to be read as word-signs. And upon his death, at forty-two, the Egyptian writing system was far from fully understood.

If the sentence "No Mayan epig-

detailed knowledge of the modern Mayan languages of the area.

It is incorrect to say that "only a few Etruscan words can be read." All the Etruscan words can be "read"—that is, pronounced—because they are in a familiar alphabet, transitional between the Greek and the Roman. The trouble is that the vast majority of Etruscan inscriptions consist of names only or of brief votive inscriptions; we cannot understand them because there is basically nothing there to understand.

Michael Ventris was an "amateur epigrapher" only in the sense that he was not paid for his work; he, too, like Champollion and Stuart, had prepared from boyhood to interpret his script, Linear B. And he, too, relied on the work of his predecessors, notably an American who died young, Alice Kober.

"Iberian" is not a single pre-Roman writing from Spain, and for "Sinaitic" read "Proto-Sinaitic"; for the scripts covered by those names there is wide, though not unanimous, agreement on many points of interpretation. Archaic Sumerian and earliest Egyptian are hardly "undeciphered" in the or-

ordinary sense; but they resist interpretation. Only the *Proto-Elamite* and Indus Valley scripts belong in the list. (Proto-Elamite has nothing to do with Elamite, which was read 150 years ago, toward the beginning of the process that enables us to read Mesopotamian cuneiform. And, by the way, Mayan writing resembles cuneiform very closely in its inner working.) The characters of Rongorongo, from Easter Island, may *represent* a language (or not); it cannot be said that they *are* a language. And the runes—whether fu-

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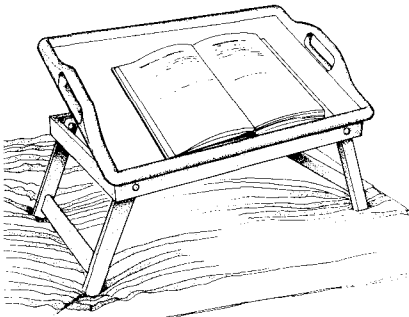


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rapher has made a greater contribution than David Stuart" is to be read, in keeping with the article title, as "greater contribution to decipherment," then it is incorrect; Stuart was not yet born when the key discoveries were made (that is, by 1960). If any one person should be singled out, it is a scholar not mentioned at all in the article: Floyd Lounsbury, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at Yale University. His contribution is perhaps too subtle to be explained without a great deal of linguistic data, but it involves

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thark or later varieties, whether Scandinavian or from elsewhere in Europe—do not and never did belong in the category of undeciphered scripts.

All this is not to diminish the talents of David Stuart; he is a peerless epigrapher, but he does not rank among the decipherers of Mayan glyphs.

PETER T. DANIELS
Chicago, Ill.

"The Decipherment of Ancient Maya" was a generally accurate and insightful account of the exciting new breakthroughs in cracking Maya script. However, it is not true that the Soviet scholar Yuri Valentinovich Knorosov's great article of 1952—establishing the phonetic component in Maya glyphs—was "filled with . . . Marxist-Leninist rhetoric." Published when Stalin was still alive, it has not one reference to Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, or any other Marxist icon. My Russian-speaking wife (Knorosov's translator) and I have read everything that Knorosov has ever published, and it is apolitical throughout.

What Eric Thompson, his principal opponent, jumped on was the preface to the 1952 article; this was written not by Knorosov but by his editor, a Party hack named S. P. Tolstov. Playing a Cold War version of dirty pool, Thompson managed to pin the Marxist-Leninist label on Knorosov in his many attacks on him in Western journals. It is a shame to see such a canard perpetuated. The real reason the decipherment was held back for so many decades was not Knorosov's alleged rhetoric but Thompson's flawed view of the nature of the script, and the fact that he had cowed his acquiescent colleagues into agreement with his views.

Thompson was no Champollion; Knorosov was.

MICHAEL D. COE
*Yale University
New Haven, Conn.*

So when did our current cosmic cycle begin, anyway? Was it on August 13, 3114 B.C., as David Roberts states, or was it on February 18, 3102 B.C., the beginning of Hindu Kali Yuga?

Here we have two apparently disparate cultures, separated by time, determining their present eras to have begun within twelve years of each other.

TOM LOPES
New Bedford, Mass.

The major Mayan mystery is the base-date 3114 B.C. Singularly unsuited to the New World, it fits perfectly for Egypt, where records began circa 3110 B.C.

How did it get to America? Barry Fell has the best theory so far: Maui brought writing when he crossed the Pacific, in 231 B.C. He could have brought the base-date, too.

TERTIUS CHANDLER
Berkeley, Calif.

As fascinating and informative as "The Decipherment of Ancient Maya" was to read, it is damagingly flawed by several factual errors concerning other troublesome ancient languages or scripts. In listing several of the world's undeciphered "major writing systems," David Roberts includes "Mohenjo-Daro, from the Indus Valley; futhark runes, from Scandinavia; [and] Elamite, from Iran." Mohenjo-Daro, of course, is a major archaeological site of the Indus Valley civilization, and it is the Indus Valley script, not "Mohenjo-Daro," that remains linguistically undeciphered. This may perhaps be shrugged off as a disagreement over semantics, but such is not the case with Roberts's offhand remarks concerning futhark runes and Elamite.

As regards futhark runes, runic writing continued in Iceland and Scandinavia into the fourteenth century A.D., and scholars have never been at a serious loss to decipher runic writings. Popular and scholarly studies abound. In fact, being an avid scholar of Teutonic antiquity, I kept a diary using futhark runes when I was a teenager, way back in the 1960s. Not only have the various futhark systems of writing long since been understood, but for several years now it has been possible for a person to obtain runic-alphabet font sets for IBM-compatible computer systems—not for research but for playing at divination or otherwise being cute. How is it, then, that Roberts, who has written the book *Iceland: Land of the Sagas*, labels "futhark runes" as undeciphered?

Scholars have also long been able to read the Elamite script. We can read the Elamite legal texts, we can read the Proto-Elamite script, later Elamite inscriptions in cuneiform, and even Akkadian texts of Mesopotamian laws written for Elamite rulers in both Elam-



ite and Mesopotamian cuneiform. In fact, one of the more important linguistic discoveries of the past several years has been the demonstration that Elamite and Dravidian are members of the same language group, a discovery that adds credence to the arguments of various Soviet scholars that the Indus Valley script is also related to Dravidian.

Admittedly, Roberts's article concerns the Mayan script, not Medieval Scandinavian or Ancient Indo-Iranian scripts. Yet Roberts seeks to convey to the literate public interesting and complex information about Mayan civilization based on recent advancements toward the decipherment of Mayan. If, however, Roberts makes such flagrant errors concerning "Mohenjo-Daro," the runic futhark, and Elamite, how can he not be suspected of even worse errors when he speaks of the Mayan script? Given that he misses the mark so badly in his few offhand remarks about linguistics and decipherment, how can he be taken at all seriously when he goes on to discuss linguistics and decipherment?

JACE T. CROUCH
Alma, Mich.

"The Decipherment of Ancient Maya" is undoubtedly the best article I've read in five years as an *Atlantic* subscriber. Keep up the good work!

CHARLIE UPDEGRAPH
Chattanooga, Tenn.

David Roberts replies:

I do not pretend to be an expert on scripts such as Elamite, Etruscan, or Rongorongo. The single paragraph in which I mention them is meant to be an aside, to tantalize readers with the knowledge that dozens of languages have resisted all efforts to decipher them. I cannot help feeling, however, that there is more than a little quibbling in Peter Daniels's and Jace Crouch's complaints. The field of decipherment is rife with factions and controversy (*vide* Knorosov and Thompson). In my own defense I would point out that Daniels and Crouch contradict each other as to whether Proto-Elamite has been deciphered; that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, one of my sources, says explicitly that Iberian, Etruscan, Sinaitic, Elamite, and Rongorongo remain undeciphered scripts; that Ste-

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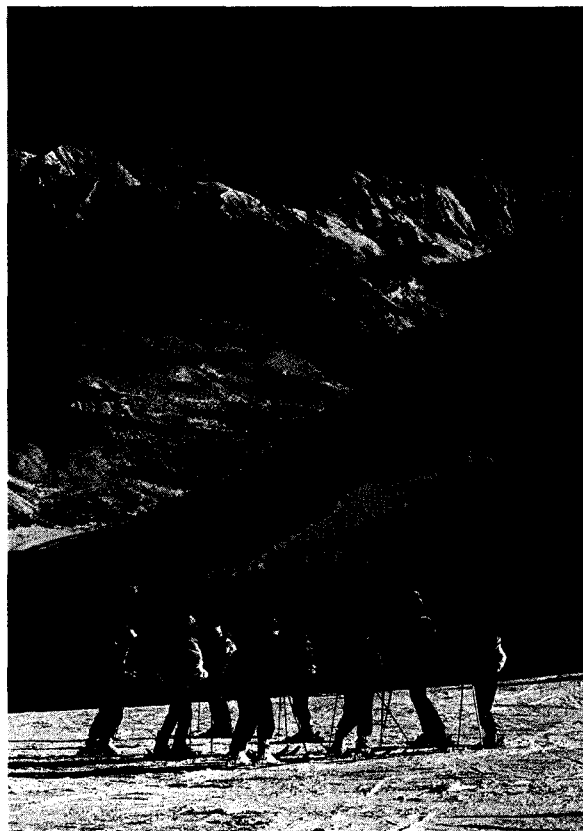
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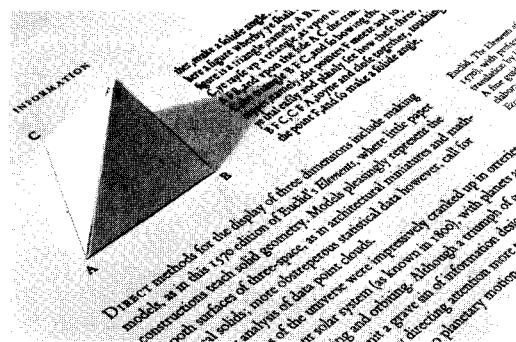
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phen Houston, one of the foremost epigraphers, titles his book *Maya Glyphs* (not *Mayan Glyphs*); and so on. But this, too, is quibbling.

I am grateful to Michael Coe—a great scholar, whose lucid *The Maya* is the best general summary of the culture's achievement—for setting the record straight on Knorosov. Let us hope that his correction reaches the ears of his many colleagues who, apparently taking Thompson at his word, repeat the slur against Knorosov. Alas, too few of us have consulted the 1952 article, or could read its Russian if we had.

OKLAHOMA CITY

I am disappointed that James Traub's generally well-reasoned article "Oklahoma City: Separate and Equal" (September *Atlantic*) fails to maintain an important distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination. Instead, Traub lumps the two concepts together under his oversimplified rubric of "desegregation."

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka forbade the deliberate (*de jure*) segregation of children in public schools on the basis of their race. *Brown* thus mandated an end to the dual system of public education that had existed in the South and in scattered northern cities since the late nineteenth century. But it was only in the much later decisions of *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968) and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) that the Supreme Court required school boards to engage in the racial assignment of students—and mandatory busing—to affirmatively achieve integration within school districts. Although such racial balancing was ostensibly justified as a remedy for earlier compulsory school segregation, in fact the racial imbalances to be corrected were, and are, better understood as unintended consequences of residential housing patterns. Thus the federal courts came to require the use of racial quotas in public schools to remedy a *de facto* "discrimination" that school officials did not create.

Unfortunately, Traub draws no line between desegregation as it was understood after *Brown* and desegregation—better termed "integration"—as it was

understood after *Swann*. The two are fundamentally different concepts. One prohibits where the other requires racial discrimination. And whereas the cause of segregation in school systems prior to *Brown* was obvious, the causes of continued *de facto* residential segregation are complicated and obscure. As Traub apparently acknowledges, the same can generally be said for the continued existence of differences and disparities between ethnic groups in our society.

The Court's decision last term in *Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell*, holding that the effects of past school segregation need be eliminated only "to the extent practicable," not only represents a limitation of *Swann* but potentially points the way toward an eventual restoration of the nondiscriminatory system of *Brown*. One might well ask what other solution is possible in today's multiracial urban districts.

ROBERT RENNER
Fresno, Calif.

James Traub replies:

The evolution of attitudes and of educational practices, rather than of Supreme Court doctrine, was the subject of my article. However, I can't agree with Robert Renner that the Supreme Court should have simply declared Jim Crow laws unconstitutional as they applied to public schools and then gotten out of the business. In *Swann* and in later decisions, including *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, the Court found that school boards could engage in any number of practices that constituted *de jure* segregation, despite the existence of a formally race-neutral policy. Only because of such findings was it possible to desegregate—integrate, if you prefer—school systems outside the South.

I'm obviously skeptical of further desegregation efforts, if only because demographics have made them irrelevant. But if integration is a good thing, as I think it is, then I can't imagine why we should regret Supreme Court decisions that made it possible in dozens of cities across the country, or why the very word "integration" should take on a pejorative cast.

Do we want to promote "differences and disparities between ethnic groups?" I, for one, do not, as I hope my article made clear.

ADVICE & CONSENT

With regard to V. T. Boatwright and Kathleen Cushman's apparent disagreement over PX liquor (Letters to the Editor, September *Atlantic*), I would like to add a piece of clarifying information:

The exchange system in the Department of Defense, although not subject to certain taxes, often has agreements with local business communities which bring its prices in line with the average prices in the area. These "excess profits" go into the funds (or at least used to go into them) that provide for new exchange and commissary facilities.

Cushman and Boatwright are both correct; they are just not discussing the same point.

PAUL A. NOWAK
Sterling, Va.

Michael Lydon's review of *The James Jones Reader* ("A Voice Against Anonymous Death," September *Atlantic*) (1) gives the subtitle "Outstanding Selections From His War Writings" without saying who has done the selecting; (2) "hear[s] the editors arguing implicitly" without ever naming those editors; and (3) even concedes that "the editors of the *Reader* have a point," so Lydon is himself no "voice against anonymous death."

On behalf of my colleague James R. Giles and his fellow editor J. Michael Lennon, I urge that you divulge their identity.

J. I. MILLER
Chair, Department of English
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Ill.

Mr. Giles's and Mr. Lennon's names were omitted by oversight, and we apologize. Thanks to Mr. Miller for setting the record straight.

—THE EDITORS

In your September Almanac, "Q&A" asks if any one hiccup cure is best. The doctors can't recommend one, but a bartender can. Sprinkle sugar on a wedge of lemon and then put a few drops of Angostura bitters (a common and inexpensive bar item) on the sugar. Bite into the lemon. It never fails.

ROBERT F. DOHERTY
San Francisco, Calif.

FOCUSING ON EDUCATION

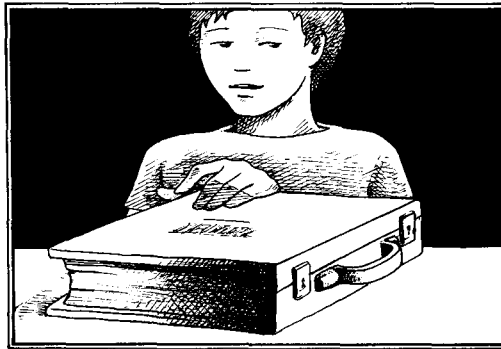
THIS IS THE FOURTH IN A SERIES OF PUBLIC-SERVICE ADVERTISEMENTS SPONSORED BY ROCKWELL INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION ABOUT THE NATION'S EDUCATION CRISIS. THEY ARE PUBLISHED TO ENCOURAGE INFORMED DISCUSSION AND DEBATE.

THE PAST DECADE WITNESSED AN extraordinary outpouring of education books and manifestos, ranging from *A Nation at Risk* to Theodore S.Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*. When the smoke clears and the tumult dies down, however, what is education all about? It is about what people know and are able to do. It is content, or knowledge; skills, or developed capacities; and purpose, or the moral and ethical vision that gives life direction and meaning. It is acquired by study, example, and practice. Education is demanding yet, if the demands are met, profoundly satisfying. This truism has been brought home by the release of yet another report, the best of the lot to date: *What Work Requires of Schools*.

The product of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), it is a document that talks sense to the American people (and American students in particular) about education—in spite of (or perhaps because of) its source: the U.S. Department of Labor. Chaired by ex-secretary William E. Brock, the 28-member commission asked tough questions and produced answers that all of us should attend to. Instead of homilies, the report offers specifics: What are the skills needed for employment? What are acceptable levels of proficiency? How can we assess them? And how can the nation's schools, businesses, and homes buy in?

Horrified to find that "more than half of our young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and hold a good job," the commission did not point fingers. The reason for our dismal state is also the source of dynamic growth and economic potential: the globalization of commerce and the explosive growth of technology. Our schools have simply not kept pace. American schools are poorly suited to the knowledge-based economy of the present, let alone the future—a major reason many students find school dull and irrelevant.

The SCANS report makes no bones about what must be done. All Americans must develop fundamental competencies.



Knowing and Doing

BY DENIS P. DOYLE

earned self-esteem, and be ethical.

Sound familiar? SCANS calls for a revival of the ancient and honorable idea of a liberal education, the education that makes lives of ordered liberty possible. Writing more than 150 years ago in *The Uses of the University*, John Henry Newman captured the essence of the SCANS report when he said the only truly vocational education is a liberal education. He was right then, he is right now. And what are the next steps? Over the next three months SCANS will consider what its recommendations will mean to schools—curriculum, school organization, teacher preparation. Like a liberal education, the SCANS recommendations initiate a process, a way of seeing and dealing with the world that requires continual change and refinement.

The SCANS document, then, is more than a report. It is a challenge to the American people. It lays down the gauntlet. Read it. Enter the conversation. Tell SCANS what you think. Now it's your turn—and your responsibility. Talking about education reform is no longer enough. It's time to act.

For additional information and copies of the report, call or write the U.S. Department of Labor, SCANS, 200 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20210; (800) 788-SKILL.

Denis P. Doyle is an education analyst and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. With David T. Kearns, the deputy secretary of education, he is a co-author of Winning the Brain Race: A Bold Plan to Make Our Schools Competitive (ICS Press).

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THE DECEMBER ALMANAC



HEALTH & SAFETY

The northern half of the United States this month receives a scant nine hours or so of sunshine a day—if it happens to be sunny. Pollution and tall buildings further diminish exposure to sunlight in urban areas. One result: people in northern cities during winter-time virtually stop producing vitamin D, which contact with sunlight causes the body to synthesize. Vitamin D is essential in the absorption of calcium, and it is also thought to help prevent certain types of cancer. One suggestive study has found that women who live in large northern cities have a higher risk of developing and dying of breast cancer than their southern counterparts. The mortality rate from breast cancer is almost 50 percent higher in New York and Chicago than in Phoenix and Tampa.

GOVERNMENT

December 30, deadline set by the Federal Aviation Administration for all airlines to equip half their larger aircraft (planes that have more than 30 seats) with two new safety devices that will supplement the usual ground-based surveillance systems. One of the devices will warn pilots of windshear—a sudden major change in the wind's speed or direction. Windshear has caused accidents resulting in some 500 deaths during the past decade. The other device is known as a "traffic alert and collision avoidance system" (TCAS), and will warn pilots of poten-



tial collisions with other aircraft. It will provide guidance in the form of voiced and visual instructions, such as "climb" or "limit descent to 2,000 feet per minute." The FAA has mandated the installation of the windshear and traffic systems in all remaining larger planes by December 30, 1993.

ENVIRONMENT

After testing various prototypes, Amtrak will this month begin ordering environment-friendly toilet systems for its new Superliner cars, which are to be used on long-distance routes in the West. The cars will be equipped with retention systems, and will replace old cars whose toilet waste is released onto the tracks after the train reaches a certain speed. Retention systems have been the norm in the more populous East for some time—with the notable exception of the Heritage sleepers, the oldest Amtrak cars, which employ "direct-dump" toilets—but the length of time between service stops on many western routes has long deterred their complete adoption there. The new systems must be able to contain all wastes for up to 72 hours.



THE SKIES

December 5, New Moon. 14–15, the Geminid meteor shower peaks tonight; the Geminids are possibly the remnants of an extinct comet whose core is now the asteroid Phaethon. 21, Full Moon; just before dawn today (EST) the Moon will be partly eclipsed by the shadow of Earth, an event widely visible in the Americas, eastern Asia, and the Pacific. 22, the Winter Solstice; in the Northern Hemisphere the Sun will appear lower in the sky than at any other time of year.



FOOD

Almost every night this month tens of thousands of trout, salmon, lobsters, shrimp, and other marine creatures will be flying overhead—in the form of gifts packed away in the cargo holds of courier-service aircraft. Much of the seafood comes from smokehouses, which often fill orders from catalogue companies; these houses send out about 75 percent of their yearly supply during the holiday season. Restaurants are also getting into the mail-order seafood business. Legal Sea Foods, a Boston-based restaurant company, ships some 1,300 pounds of seafood a day this month to destinations nationwide. The Japanese, meanwhile, order fresh tuna from the United States by the planeload—15,000 to 30,000 pounds on a typical Federal Express fish flight.

Q & A

Why is it traditional to dress boys in blue and girls in pink?

As late as the turn of the century, babies in this country generally wore white. But American parents thereafter seemed to want their infants to be readily identifiable by gender—perhaps because they were taking them out in public more often—and the practice of color-coding began. It was some time, however, before a consensus on the code was reached. In fact, many clothing manufacturers initially promoted pink for boys and blue for girls, on the grounds that pink is "more decided and stronger"—and hence more

masculine—than blue, said to be "delicate and dainty," and therefore feminine. Others followed the French practice, which was just the reverse. Greeting-card companies helped shape public opinion through the marketing of gender-specific birth announcements, for whose colors they claimed illustrious precedent indeed: the eighteenth-century painter Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* and *Pinky*. The blue-for-boys faction eventually gained ascendancy, and the postwar Baby Boomers were the first infants to be consistently color-coded by gender—perhaps helping to shape that generation's staggering propensity for classification and trends of all kinds.



100 YEARS AGO

Charles H. Moore, writing in the December, 1891, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "Of that recent phase of French art known as impressionism, it should be said that as a disciplinary movement it may have its use, but regarded as a final and sufficient form of art it is a mistake that is destined to be short-lived. Impressionism was set on foot by Corot. It was, in fact, inherent in the aims and methods of Constable. The ignoring of specific form and the suppression of details in seeking to attain an emphatic expression of the total effect of chiaroscuro and color . . . have marked the French treatment of landscape since the beginning of the naturalistic movement. But the contemporary impressionists carry the principle much further than did their forerunners, and err more shortsightedly in making an end of that which should be only a means."



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REPORTS & COMMENT

NOTES

Remember Pearl Harbor How?

Neither Japanese nor Americans know quite how to commemorate the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, but the Japanese spend much more time worrying about it

IT WAS ALMOST three years ago, near the beginning of 1989, when I was living in Japan, that friends started to mention the "upcoming anniversary." I didn't know what they were talking about, but since I often didn't know what was happening around me in Japan, I decided to wait for enlightenment. I began to get the point when someone mentioned "the upcoming fiftieth anniversary," which he then nailed down with a date: December 8, 1991. By Japanese reckoning that is the fiftieth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. As Americans will be reminded this month, the Japanese planes came in on a Sunday morning, when U.S. sailors could be expected to be hung over and sleeping in. By that time it was already Monday, December 8, in Japan.

Americans old enough to remember that day certainly remember it vividly, but there are fewer and fewer of them around. For most of the American public this month's TV documentaries and commemorative ceremonies will be very much like the other documentaries and ceremonies we periodically see. Within the past two years the news media, ever alert to anniversaries, have invited the United States to take a look at Vietnam fifteen years after the fall of Saigon, at the space program twenty years after men first walked on the moon, and at Germany fifty years after Hitler rolled into Poland. This month we'll look back at Japan—with magazine features, a speech by President George Bush at Pearl Harbor, and a commemorative postage stamp—and then we'll move on to something else.

However the United States re-

sponds to the Pearl Harbor observances, it cannot possibly meet the expectations that have been building up in Japan. Indeed, by far the most interesting part of the fiftieth anniversary is the way Japan's opinion-making class—its popular press and foreign-policy specialists—has prepared the public to cringe in dread of U.S. outbursts this month.

Not every recent Japanese article about U.S.-Japanese relations has begun with a phrase like "As the clock ticks toward the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. . . ." But a lot of them seem to start that way. Last summer a magazine called *Foresight* told readers about an ominous statistical indicator. In the previous forty-nine years a total of eighty-six books about Pearl Harbor had been published in the United States, but fifteen were scheduled for publication in 1991 alone. "A bipartisan bill has been submitted to Congress to set

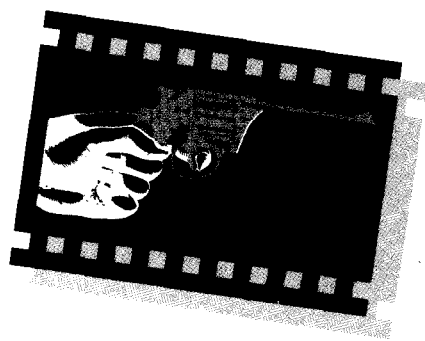
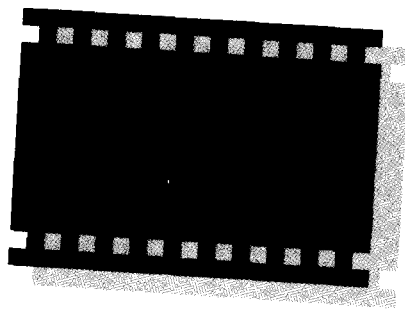
Dec. 7 aside as a national memorial day," *Foresight* said. "There is no doubt that the 50-year anniversary of Pearl Harbor is the big event for both Japanese and Americans." *Shukan Gendai*, a very popular weekly magazine, reminded readers that Bush was going to Pearl Harbor, and said,

The United States is a most barbarous country. In Western movies, people always say, "If you have a complaint, come and fight me!" . . . Anti-Japanese feelings have reached the point that Americans are saying, "Now it's time for you



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to pay us what you owe us! If you don't surrender, the only solution is a war."

Shukan Themis, another weekly (*shukan* means "weekly"), carried an article saying that "fearful White Anglo Saxon Protestants, led by President Bush, have launched a retaliation against Japan. . . . The WASP is a white supremacist. He cannot tolerate non-whites taking the initiative in a single area." *Shukan Shincho* reported on the success of a recent American book called *The Coming War With Japan*, which, like most books on U.S.-Japanese relations, is vastly more interesting to Japanese readers than to Americans. The magazine said that sales of the translated version of the book should reach 350,000 copies by Pearl Harbor Day.

It is a little misleading to quote at length from these magazines, collectively called *shukanishi*, because they occupy a peculiar niche in the Japanese press. Their look, heft, and nationwide following make them seem similar to *People* and *Sports Illustrated*, but they are known to be cavalier with the facts in a way much closer to the *Weekly World News*—"Latest Photos of Bigfoot" tradition. The same *Shukan Shincho* report on sales of *The Coming War* said that the book was also hugely popular in America, where in fact it has never appeared on any best-seller list. A somewhat higher toned magazine called *Sapio*, whose name is apparently derived from "sapience," said in all seriousness that with U.S.-Japanese tensions on the rise, a certain anti-Japanese joke was being "widely circulated" in the United States. Here is the joke, in its entirety as reported by *Sapio*: "Officers of the Ministry of Finance, Japan's elite, piss cold as ice. And an abacus is implanted in their brains." Forgive me if you've heard this one before.

For all their excesses, the magazines do shape public opinion, leaving the Japanese reader with the impression that Americans are waiting to run amok in December and meanwhile telling incomprehensible jokes. The Pearl Harbor mania in the weeklies seems to parallel more-respectable views. Every time I have interviewed a Japanese official in the past year, he has asked me how I thought Americans would react to the upcoming anniversary. A year ago in Tokyo a Japanese politician

summoned me to his office. After we'd sipped tea for forty minutes, he said, "By the way"—the phrase that in practice means "Now let's get to the point." "What do you think about the reaction . . . ?" I've enjoyed looking for stories in the U.S. press about the countdown. They are almost always by correspondents in Tokyo who get the "by the way" treatment from nervous Japanese contacts every day.

THE OBVIOUS question is why? Why should so many Japanese be counting the days until the anniversary, while so few Americans seem to have given it a thought?

There are a few time-honored and partly satisfactory explanations. The United States as a rule pays less attention to any given country than that country pays back. This is a source of strain in U.S. relations with Mexico, Canada, the Philippines, and many other countries, including Japan. In a way it would be more flattering to the Japanese if Americans really were telling "piss cold as ice" jokes: at least they'd be thinking about Japan. Also, Japan is famous for its edginess on the whole subject of the Second World War. Its experience with China and Korea, whose governments are always complaining about Japanese history textbooks and signs of nascent militarism in Japan, seems to have left it with the belief that old resentments can bubble up at any time.

But something more must be involved. Japan has less to be apologetic about this month than it did, say, four years ago, during the fiftieth anniversary of the "Rape of Nanking." (At least 100,000 Chinese were killed in Nanking, as compared with fewer than 3,500 Americans at Pearl Harbor, and the Chinese were nearly all civilians. This anniversary passed almost unnoticed in Japan.) The way the Japanese Imperial Army fought was sometimes atrocious, and Japan's relations with China, in particular, are still colored by both sides' awareness of this record. Americans tend to lump the attack on Pearl Harbor with Japan's war crimes in Asia, and to equate Japan's aggression with Hitler's. Few people in Japan see it that way.

The U.S. complaint about Pearl Harbor involves one very specific and one sweeping charge. The specific complaint is that the attack began while Japanese emissaries in Washing-

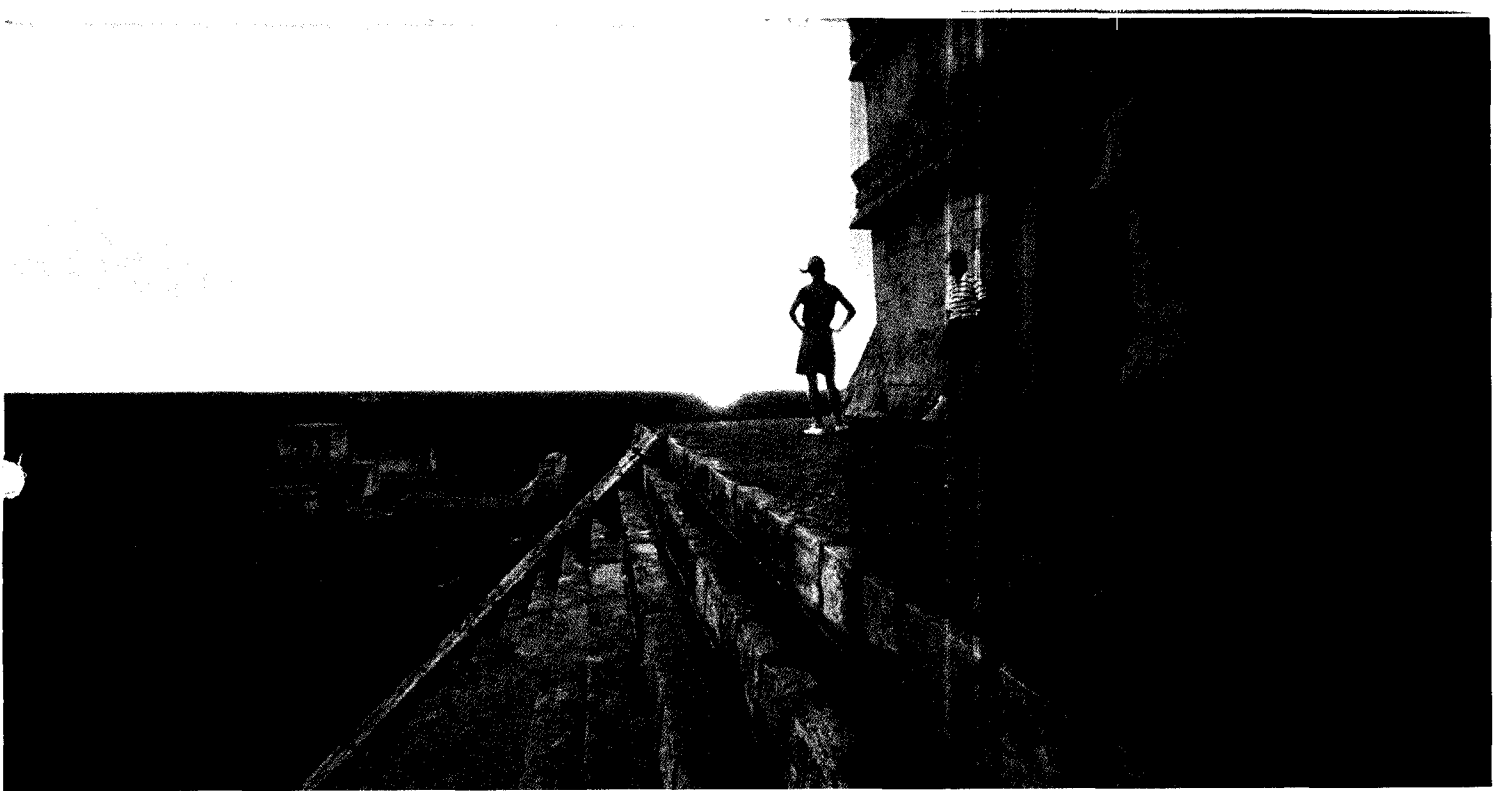
ton were still purporting to negotiate in good faith. For this the Japanese government has freely apologized. The broader complaint is that Japan brought America into the war by striking first. The Japanese response to this charge is a much more complicated matter.

For provoking the United States to fight, Japanese officials have often expressed "regret." The regret is understandable and sincere, since the consequence was a war that turned out, as Emperor Hirohito tactfully put it in his surrender message, "not necessarily to Japan's advantage." But there has been nothing like an outright "apology" for Pearl Harbor, and there is not likely to be one this month, because of the widespread Japanese view that the main thing to regret about the "Pacific War" is that the country unwisely took on a much more powerful foe.

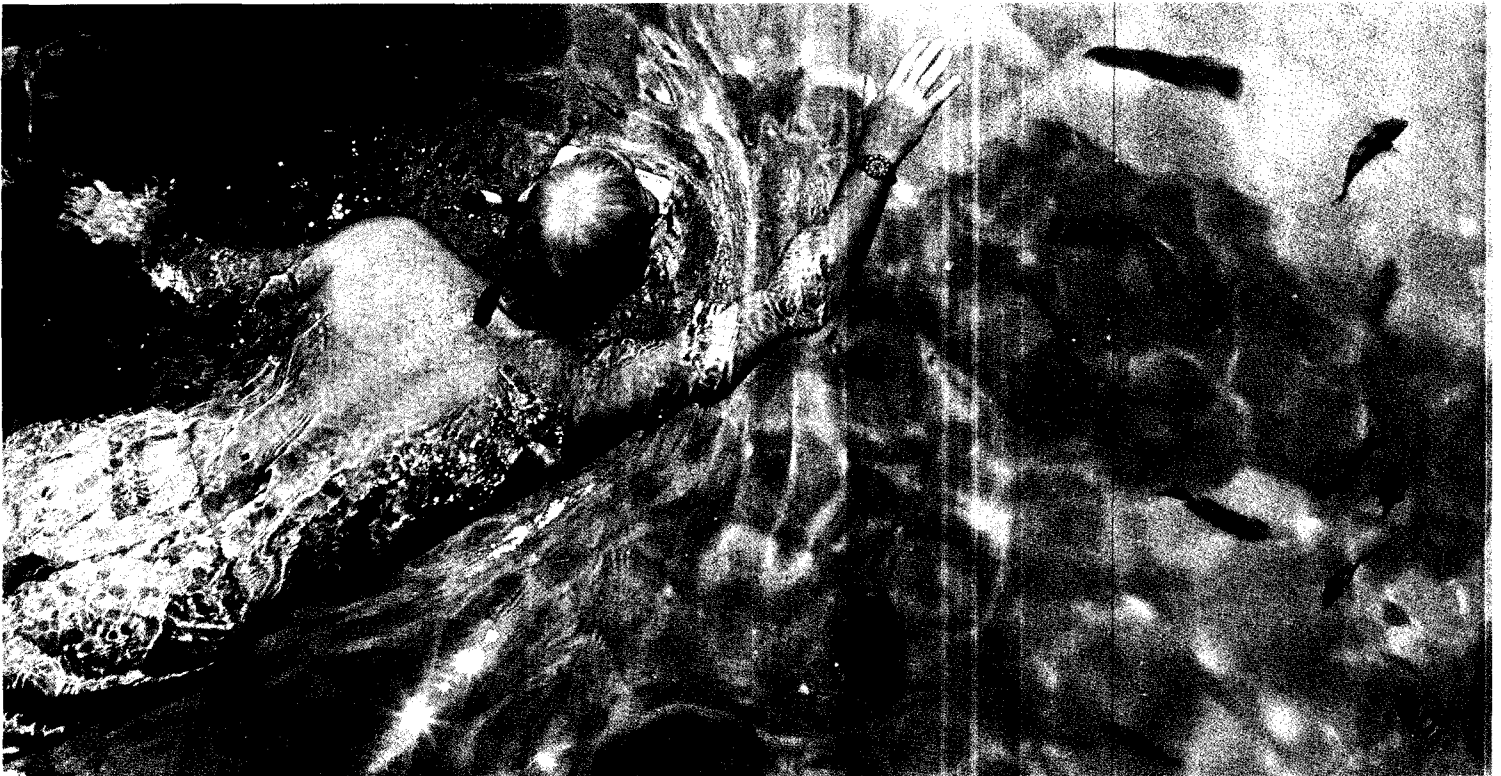
Japan, of course, tried to occupy its neighbors by force in the 1930s, but it was hardly the first country to do so. As many Japanese writers emphasized at the time, the same countries the Japanese army was conquering had previously been conquered by armies from Britain, France, Holland, or, in the case of the Philippines, the United States. Japan's strategic ideal would have been to hold on to this empire without colliding head-on with the United States. Ben-Ami Shillony, an Israeli specialist in Japanese history, has said that if Japan had

taken the side of the Western Allies in World War II, as she had done in World War I, or had she remained neutral, as she had been before Pearl Harbor, her prewar attempts at establishing a regional hegemony and her wartime violations of human rights might have subsequently been condoned in the context of the Cold War, as was the case with many Asian countries.

Within the Japanese military government, the case for attacking Pearl Harbor was that America would sooner or later intervene to push Japan back in Asia. If war was inevitable, Japan's best chance lay with a first strike. Some Japanese strategists thought that even after Pearl Harbor the United States would lack the stomach for a long war, and would agree to a kind of demarcation line down the middle of the Pacific, separating Japanese and American zones of influence. For the Japanese, then, the tragedy of Pearl

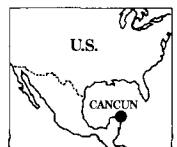


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Harbor was that it indicated their inability to avoid a direct showdown with the United States, in addition to being a disastrous miscalculation of how America would respond to a sneak attack. Each of these was a failure for Japan; neither, in the general Japanese view, was an unpardonable sin. Even in the days of total humiliation immediately after the war, Emperor Hirohito expressed deep "regret" but declined to "apologize" to General Douglas MacArthur, saying, "It was not clear to me that our course was unjustified. Even now I am not sure how future historians will allocate the responsibility for the war."

Shortly after the United States finished pummeling Saddam Hussein's army, a magazine called *Bungei Shunju*, Japan's counterpart to, well, *The Atlantic*, published an article with the charming title "Victor Nation America, Do Not Be Arrogant: Japanese People Should Discard Their Blind Trust in White Man's Society." After the Second World War, it observed, the United States "passed judgment on Japan, saying that 'Whatever reason there may have been, the side which started the war is in the wrong.' Japan . . . became stricken with shame."

A familiar chestnut holds that Japanese society is driven by shame more than by guilt—that people are more attuned to whether they are offending the sensitivities of others than to whether they are violating their inner "thou shalt not" rules. A sense that they are about to be subjected to a shaming ritual may account for the exaggerated countdown in Japan.

But perhaps the most powerful explanation lies in another Japanese instinct—the "victim consciousness," or *higaisha ishiki*, that governs many of Japan's relations with great powers from the outside world, which for the past century has meant the United States. Japanese leaders of the Tokugawa era felt victimized by Commodore Perry's arrival; the leaders of the 1930s felt victimized by American and British determination to deny Japan its place in the sun. Over the past twenty years the Japanese press has emphasized the country's victimization by American demands to open up the market. The preparation for Pearl Harbor is essentially a warning that Japan is about to be victimized again.

—James Fallows

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GREAT BRITAIN

"That Woman" Versus the Chattering Classes

Margaret Thatcher, ousted from power one year ago, was loathed by large segments of the British intelligentsia. A review of some epic bile

WE ALL KNOW that if you are old enough to remember the year at all, you can remember where you were and what you were doing on November 22, 1963, when you heard that President Kennedy had been shot. Recently an opinion poll in a London paper confirmed what had already occurred to me: that most of us can remember what we were doing a year ago, exactly twenty-seven years after Dallas, on the morning of November 22, 1990, when we heard that Margaret Thatcher had resigned as Prime Minister.

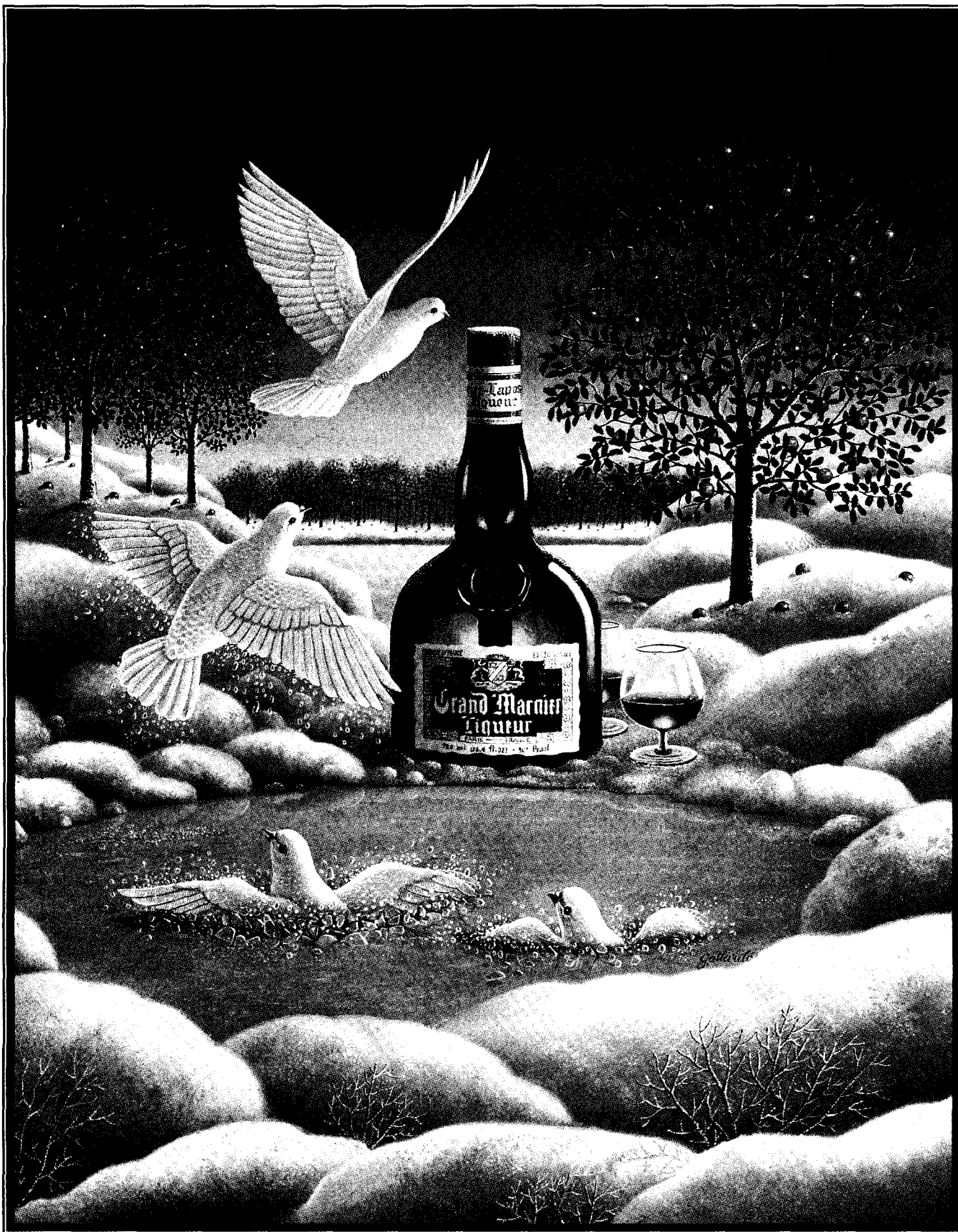
Quite apart from her achievement—unique in British politics since well before the advent of universal suffrage—in fighting and winning three consecu-

tive general elections and in holding office continuously for longer than any of her predecessors since the early nineteenth century, Thatcher was the first Prime Minister since William Ewart Gladstone to give an "ism" to the language. People recognized "Thatcherism" even if they had some difficulty defining it. And more than any other politician I can remember, she aroused strong feelings—some loved her, more hated her, few were ambivalent about her.

In a nice historical irony, Thatcher was destroyed by a device that she had been the first to use, in order to grasp power herself. Until the 1960s the Conservative Party had no formal mechanism for choosing its leader (who as a matter of course became the Prime Minister when the party was in power). Tory leaders simply "emerged." This displeased progressive Tories, not least because they had supported the late R. A. Butler, who twice failed to emerge, in 1957 and again in 1963, when many thought him much the best-qualified candidate and the choice of the whole party if it could have been consulted. After Sir Alec Douglas-Home's mysterious emergence as Harold Macmillan's successor, in 1963, the once and future Cabinet Minister Iain Macleod published a historic article in *The Spectator* exposing the "magic circle" of men of similar insider background ("Eight of the nine men mentioned in the last sentence went to Eton") who had effectively chosen Home. The article helped to doom the traditional means of selecting leaders—and the traditional dominance of the Tory Party by that magic circle of upper-class insiders.

And so a system was created for the election of the party leader by the Conservative members of Parliament. It was used for the first time in 1965, when Douglas-Home voluntarily stepped down and was succeeded by Edward Heath. The Tory tradition of loyalty (or sycophancy) being what it was, it was supposed that elections for leader would be held only when someone went quietly, as Douglas-Home had done. But there was no reason in principle why an incumbent leader should not be challenged. Ten years after Heath became leader, someone showed that there was no reason in practice, either.

The someone was Margaret Hilda

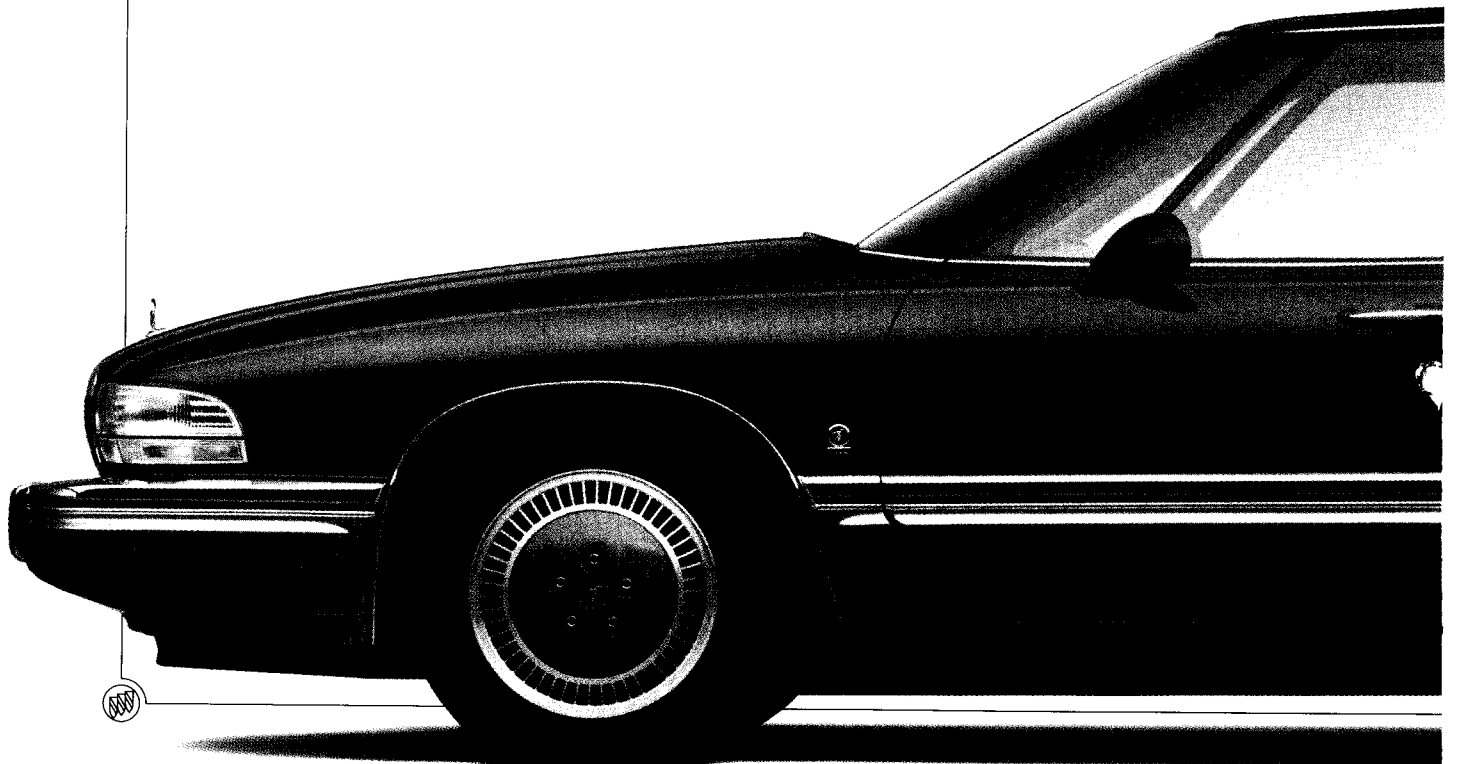


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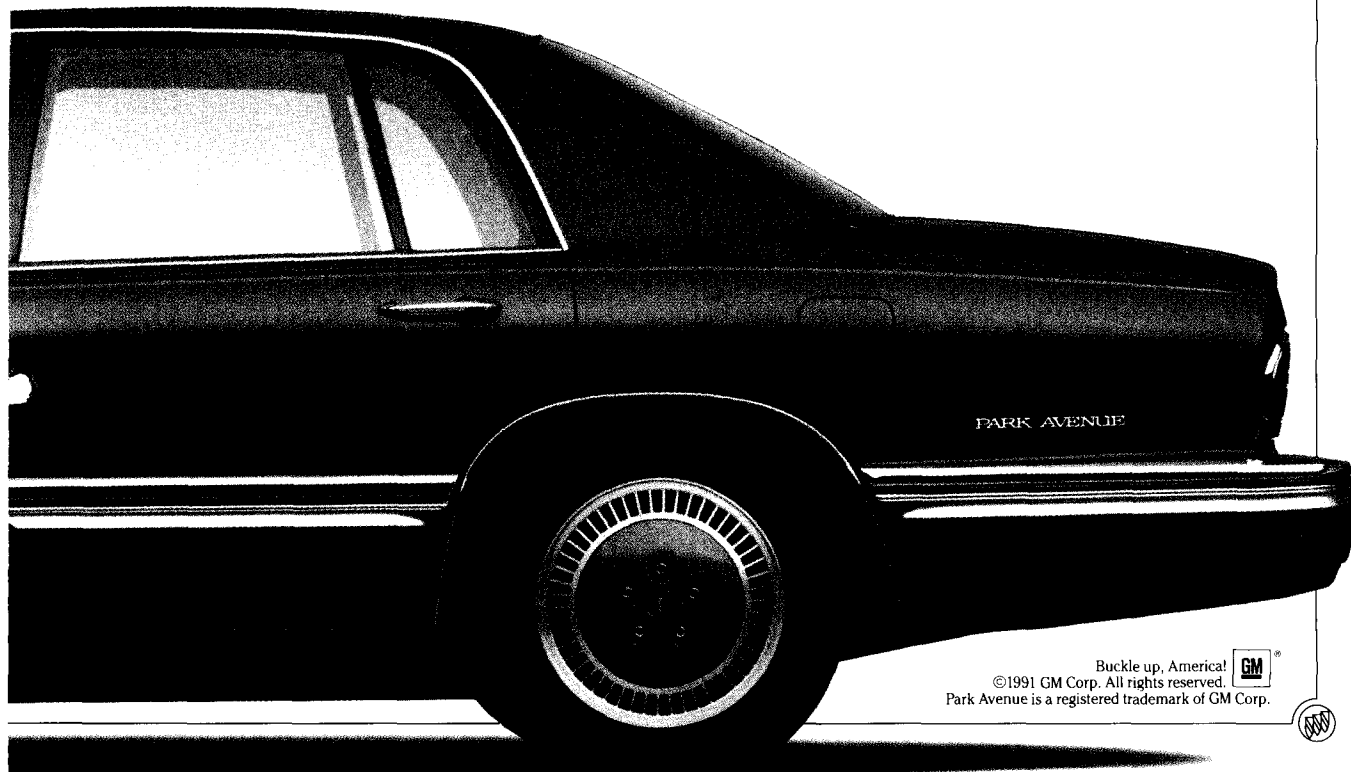
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Roberts Thatcher, then a comparatively junior member of the Conservative front bench. She was an outsider, both in the racetrack and in the broader sense, and this was the key to her career from beginning to end. In 1975 the outsider struck, challenging Heath for the leadership of the party (then in opposition). At first it was assumed that even if she emasculated the incumbent by her challenge, a more senior member of the Tory apparatus, such as William Whitelaw or Geoffrey Howe, would step in as a compromise candidate. But after Thatcher had passed and thus humbled Heath on the first ballot, the Tories followed the logic of events and chose the candidate who had had the courage to challenge.

As much to the point, they backed the interloper. This wasn't unprecedented. Mavericks had become Prime Minister before then, though usually in extreme circumstances. Lloyd George forced his way to power in 1916, Churchill in 1940, as the men who could win their wars. Almost more striking in its way, in 1868 the Conservative Party—the Tories, the Gentlemen of England, the party of Church and Crown—had taken on an exotic Jew as their Prime Minister. Margaret Thatcher was the most surprising

choice as party leader since Benjamin Disraeli.

She didn't "belong" socially, standing quite outside the aristocratic hierarchy of the party. The daughter of a Methodist shopkeeper in the small provincial town of Grantham, she had worked her way through the local grammar school and Oxford, and had become an industrial chemist and a lawyer. She married a businessman who gave her useful financial independence; she had two children, twin boy and girl; she entered Parliament in 1959; she progressed slowly up the ministerial ladder. And yet all this time she remained an outsider: by origin, by attitude, and above all by sex. Disraeli could be baptized as an Anglican; there was nothing Margaret Thatcher could do about being a woman.

THIS WAS HER weakness and her strength. She was cut off by the "homosocial" traditions of her party, which thirty years ago were very strong and are scarcely weak even now. It was a chaps' party—chaps who had known each other at school, at university, in the army; chaps who met to talk and drink in the House of Commons smoking room or the clubs of St. James's Street. This was a camarade-

rie from which the lowborn were mostly excluded, and a woman was by definition entirely excluded. And so Margaret Thatcher had to plow her own furrow, make her own friends, and attack the citadel of power from outside.

This conditioned her original attack on the leadership. Heath's time as party leader and as Prime Minister had ended in failure. He had won the 1970 election on a free-market platform, but had soon abandoned it in the face of events. After the debacle of that government in 1974, Thatcher underwent a conversion. The Tories had always had an ambiguous relationship with the doctrines of laissez-faire and the market economy: in the nineteenth century it was the Liberals who were the party of free trade. Now Thatcher was born again as a votary of laissez-faire. Under her leadership there would be no more U-turns, no more compromise.

And once she had taken office, her "outsiderness" colored the whole eleven years of her prime ministership, as she purged her party and tried to shape it in her own image. In the first years of her government a kind of inner-party opposition developed: interventionist "wets," who belonged to the Eton and



Clockwise from lower left: Thatcher's childhood home, in Grantham (above the corner shop); the young chemist; an early campaign

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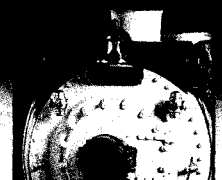
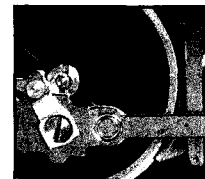
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White's Club old guard, men like Lord Soames and Sir Ian Gilmour. They were cleared out of the Cabinet before long and replaced to the extent that Thatcher could manage by people to her own taste—who were usually outsiders like herself.

Her affinity for Jews, for example, was unmistakable. When she had been converted to the true faith of free enterprise, her guru was Sir Keith Joseph, the patrician Jewish elder statesman who had already undergone the same conversion. Her own parliamentary constituency, in the north London district of Finchley, has a large Jewish population with which she closely identified; these small businessmen and accountants were almost as much “the folk from whence I came” as her own artisan and shopkeeper forebears. And an unusual number of Jews sat in Thatcher's Cabinets: Joseph, Nigel Lawson, Leon Brittan, Malcolm Rifkind, Michael Howard.

Philosemitism was a characteristic she shared with one predecessor. Thatcher quite often spoke of her reverence for Sir Winston Churchill, whom she did not in fact much resemble, except in this regard: *mutatis mutandis*, he, too, was an outsider.

Until 1940 Churchill's political career had made him anathema to the respectable. He may have been the grandson of a duke, but, as George Orwell pointed out, Churchill was not a gentleman. Throughout his life his associates were as unrespectable as he—Lloyd George, Lord Birkenhead, financiers like the American Bernard Baruch and the South African Sir Abe Bailey. When he finally became Prime Minister, he surrounded himself with a kitchen cabinet of shady hangers-on: Beaverbrook, Bracken, Lindemann.

They were surpassed in extraordinariness, if not in shadiness, by the weird crew of wizards and mountebanks whom Thatcher assembled around her in Downing Street. Some of those she attracted could be dignified with the name “intellectual,” a number of them spiritual refugees from socialism, the English equivalents of neo-conservatives. This group—the historian Hugh Thomas, the former Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt (both of them made lords by Thatcher), the journalist Paul Johnson, once the editor of the socialist *New Statesman*—stuck by her to the end with an intense personal loyalty.



Thatcher as Saint Francis: The Times's view of her arrival

Her Tory opponents reasonably said that these men were right-wingers (once left-wingers) rather than Tories. But their devotion to her was not only ideological; it was the sympathy of fellow oddballs and renegades.

Inside Number Ten itself she collected a crew of fanatical devotees. Some, like the economist Alan Walters, were already ideological sympathizers; others, like Charles Powell, had been nonpolitical civil servants, or even, like her press secretary (and hit man) Bernard Ingham, sometime Labour supporters. Besides these a fringe or riffraff of camp followers floated in and out of her office. The most conspicuous, perhaps, was the former MP and popular novelist Jeffrey Archer, whom Thatcher chose at one point to make deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, until an untoward episode with a prostitute forced his resignation. Being an outsider brings advantages; one of the disadvantages is that the outsider is often a very bad judge of men. That was, if possible, even truer of Thatcher than of Churchill.

Some in her party attacked her for ignoring or even betraying Tory tradition. They were more right than they realized. She was not a conservative: part reactionary, part radical, she never had the smallest instinct to leave things as they were. On the day after winning the 1979 election she inappropriately (and inaccurately) quoted Saint Francis: “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony.” In fact she had come to bring not peace but a sword, and she soon showed a rare tal-

ent for making herself hated—not least by the old guard in her own party. They had assumed that she would have to return to cautious, corporatist, interventionist tradition. Instead, she actually did what she had promised, reducing the income tax, cutting back state intervention in the economy, putting deflationary policies into practice in a way that soon led to rapidly rising unemployment. The ranks of her enemies swelled. They included not only the Labour Party and Heath (who never forgave her for successfully challenging his leadership) but, more significant still, “the consensus,” which she had also challenged and which resented her with increasing bitterness. But the bitterest resentment and the noisiest opposition came from a particular class that had rarely raised its voice before, because it had not needed to: the liberal academic, artistic, literary, and media community—the clerisy, or, as a wit called them, “the chattering classes.” These were the new insiders, or the new establishment; and the continuing confrontation between Thatcher and these chatterers was the most interesting subtext of her years in office.

IN 1982 THATCHER successfully led the country in the war to reconquer the Falkland Islands; in 1983 she won her second general election; in 1984–1985 she defeated a strike by the seemingly invincible miners' union, a victory in its way as dramatic as the one over General Galtieri. And then, early in 1985, she came up against a tougher enemy still: her old university. She was proposed for an honorary doctorate at Oxford, as Oxonian Prime Ministers always had been. No one could by then doubt the peculiar distaste felt for the Prime Minister within the academic community, and although such proposals had always gone through on the nod, this one was opposed. It was debated in Congregation, the parliament of the Oxford faculty, and rejected. The blackballing dons felt that Thatcher was different, because of “the cuts”—by now fighting words—in academic spending. The truth was deeper. She didn't chatter on their wavelength.

The chatterers' hatred reached a crescendo with the 1987 general election and her third victory. At the time, two newspapers asked voters how they would vote. Not any old voters: these



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were not the masses, men and women in the street, or anything like a representative cross-section. They were the clerisy, the literary and artistic intelligentsia. If their collective opinion was anything to go by, the Tories and Margaret Thatcher should have been wiped out at the election. Some were commendably frank about their motives, from the composer Sir Michael Tippett—"As an artist, I'm impelled to vote Labour, since it's the only party committed to more extensive State funding for the arts"—to the actor Antony Sher: "As a member of the arts [sic] I am heartened by [Labour's] pledge to double the arts budget." The philosopher A. J. Ayer caught the same mood when he said that he was voting for the centrist Alliance without much hope of electoral success, "but at least it is not philistine" (this last is another key word in the vocabulary of chattering Thatcherphobia).

Others who were quizzed answered with a verbal violence that became a hallmark of Thatcherphobia. "The most appropriate response" to the election, thought the playwright Dennis Potter, "would be to hawk up a contemptuous goblet of spittle onto the ballot paper." He manfully overcame this instinct, because "Mrs. Thatcher is the most obviously repellent manifestation of the most obviously arrogant, dishonest, divisive, and dangerous British government since the war. All that really counts is to get these yobs and louts away from the swill bucket." The novelist Julian Barnes was not much more temperate: "The chief function of this election is to turn out Mrs Thatcher and her spayed Cabinet, whose main achievement in the last eight years has been the legitimization of self-interest as a public and private virtue." Another playwright, Michael Frayn, said that he would vote whichever way seemed to him "to offer the best hope of getting the present barbarians out."

But the barbarians weren't evicted. Thatcher returned to Downing Street with a reduced but still large majority; the hatred of her enemies intensified. Another mini-survey of the intelligentsia, conducted in early 1988, told the same story. Peter Porter, the poet, found Margaret Thatcher "bullying, stupid and brutal," while the theater director and all-purpose intellectual Jonathan Miller went further than any

before in his choice of language. Why were so many in the cultural establishment hostile to Thatcher? he was asked. The question was silly, Miller said: "It's the same as why the bulk of the human race is hostile to typhoid." For his own part, he found the Prime Minister "loathsome, repulsive in almost every way."

If there seems an element of hysteria or attitudinizing in this, at least it wasn't confined to public declaration. Anyone who lived in England in the 1980s and mixed at all in literary society knows that. Those with long memories recall the disrupted dinner parties and broken friendships during the Suez crisis of 1956, or, if they have longer memories still, during the Spanish Civil War, twenty years earlier. Thatcherism roused feelings rather like that.

A friend of mine lives in the "NW1" district of north London once immortalized in Mark Boxer's cartoons, heartland of the chattering classes and thus the very epicenter of middle-class-intellectual anti-Thatcherism. About four years ago she gave a dinner party at which the Question of Thatcher came up. When asked, my friend said that although she could see how tiresome the Prime Minister sometimes was, how bullying or querulous, one had to admit all the same that she had done something for the country. Among the guests was a fashionable writer (by which slightly sneering adjective I mean that he has a literary

following but is barely known to the large public). Two days later the hostess received a letter from this man. He said that he felt obliged to thank her for dinner but that in view of what she had said, he could never see her again. She might as well have been explaining that for all his faults, Hitler had great achievements to his credit.

Indeed, the Thatcherphobes themselves didn't hesitate to suggest totalitarian comparisons. In the late 1980s a left-liberal political group was founded in London called Charter '88, echoing the Czech resistance group Charter '77, and an intellectual anti-Thatcherite magazine called *Samizdat* was launched. A few people connected with these may have hesitated, may have had some inkling of the absurdity and indecency of comparing people like themselves (the editor of *Samizdat* was Professor Ben Pimlott, an acclaimed academic historian who holds a chair at the University of London and who has often written for establishment newspapers) to men and women in Eastern Europe who had risked jobs, publication, liberty, and even lives for their political beliefs. But there were others who were proof against any ridicule. In that summer of 1988 the 20 June Group was also started, a think tank—or discussion group or coterie—whose purpose was to oppose Thatcher's continuing rule and to redeem the hour. Its prime movers were the playwright Harold Pinter and his wife, Lady Antonia Fraser, and its meetings were originally held at their house in Holland Park (where she had formerly lived with her first husband, the Tory MP Sir Hugh Fraser). Other members of the group included John Mortimer, Melvyn Bragg, Margaret Drabble, Fay Weldon, and (until he went into hiding the next February) Salman Rushdie.

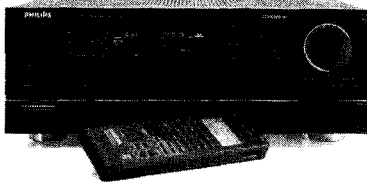
When news of this group became public, there was universal derision. The thought of these prosperous writers, broadcasters, and publishers meeting in one of the most expensive streets in London to pool their indignation about the evils of Thatcherism was irresistibly comical; there had been "champagne socialists" before, but nothing quite as rich as this. The groupies themselves smarted under the ridicule, with the exception of Pinter, who scented oppression and re-



Punch's view of Thatcher in early 1988

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plied defiantly, "We have a precise agenda and we are going to meet again and again until they break down the windows and drag us out."

NOW, BEFORE examining the psychology of this Thatcherphobia, one or two points should be made. These literary Thatcherphobes accused the Prime Minister of pursuing "extreme right-wing" policies, but they were Bollinger Bolsheviks, not men and women of the left in any serious sense. The real—the serious—left didn't love Thatcher, of course, but felt a wary respect for her. She enraged the left wing of the Labour Party by her political success, but just as much by standing up for her beliefs. And with all their rage, they were bound to admire her for that. It was their common complaint against Neil Kinnock, the leader of the opposition since 1983, that he wasn't defending socialist principle in the way that she defended anti-socialist principle.

The point was made even more cogently by Raphael Samuel, a Marxist social historian of the old left. A little more than seven months after Thatcher fell, he saluted her and her sense of history.

On Russia and eastern Europe, if not on southern Africa, on enterprise culture if not on education, and even in her brutal treatment of uneconomic pits and the coalfields, she showed an intuitive capacity to seize on what was new and developing—perhaps the first condition of the historical imagination—and she clearly cares passionately about the past, or at least her version of it.

He instanced her "excited interventions" in the debate over how history was taught in schools; her magnificently tactless lecture to the French at the time of the 1989 *bicentenaire*, telling them how it was the English who had invented liberty; and her invocation of "Victorian values." In all of this he found, "One of the unnerving things about Mrs Thatcher for anyone on the left was that she spoke our language, or at any rate addressed our traditions, far more convincingly than she did those of her own party"—or, he might have added, than most politicians on the left any longer spoke it, or addressed them.

What Samuel most admired in Thatcher was precisely her outsider-ness. She

had no feel for the traditions of the British ruling class or—despite the Falklands war or her invocations of Churchill—for the imperial dimension of British history, whence her impatience with the Commonwealth and her indifference to royalty. A lifetime of active politics seems to have insulated her from, rather than drawn her into, the mystique of Westminster and Whitehall.

She reached out instead to the provincial England of her childhood, constructing an alternative national epic in which there was a merchant-adventurer in every counting-house, a village Hampden in every store. . . . she spoke in the accents not of church but of chapel, and in her radical contempt for paternalism it is not difficult to find echoes of her Northamptonshire shoemaker forebears. Her version of Victorian values was of a piece with this, invoking the plebeian virtues of self-reliance and self-help rather than the more patrician ones of chivalry and *noblesse oblige*.

This acute analysis explains in large part the hatred that Thatcher aroused. Though those "inties," as the smart slang goes, those academics and writers, would never have begun to see the fact—and would have been horrified to be told it, since most of them suffer from the intellectual's fantasy of being a rebel even when he is drawing a large university or state salary—they resented Thatcher as an upstart. And they resented her because of her attack on their own cozy complacency as academic apparatchiks or "members of the arts."

FEW OF THE Thatcherphobes even began to examine their own motives and their own self-interest. How many of these liberal members of the arts ever stopped, for example, to address the blindingly obvious truth that all state subsidy of culture represents a net transfer of resources from poor to rich? How many dons pondered the same truth about subsidized universities? Even the finest minds were defeated by rational arguments that went against the grain of their own prejudices. I have mentioned the philosopher the late Freddie Ayer. Three years ago I sat with him, watching cricket in front of the pavilion at Lord's, as it happens, and listening to his eloquent tirade against That Woman. She was doing everything

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she could to destroy English intellectual life with her savage application of free-market doctrine and her attack on the universities. As a result, all the best people were leaving English universities for the United States. The latest example he instanced was Alan Ryan, the political scientist, who had just left New College, Oxford, for Princeton.

It was amusing to hear the eminent logician's logical confusion. Oxford used to be an independent corporation but has in the course of this century most unwisely placed itself in the financial hands of the state, from which almost half its income now comes. Princeton is a private, self-financing university. Ryan's migration from one to the other was a tribute to *laissez-faire* and private enterprise. Dons and members of the arts had a point when they complained about the philistinism of Thatcher's government, obsessed with utilitarian ideas of value for money which were inappropriately applied to academic and cultural life; what they never remembered was the old saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune.

Despite those tirades, Thatcherphobia wasn't universal among writers and artists. The novelists Anthony Powell and Kingsley Amis remained devotees of hers, and a younger novelist, Peter Ackroyd, said that he preferred a politician who honestly didn't pretend to be interested in the arts to a cultural phony. A more surprising Thatcherite was the artist Francis Bacon: "It simply isn't the point of politicians to be pro-art. I don't know if she admires painting all that much, but it doesn't matter." The renegade don Noël Annan repeatedly pointed out the weakness in the position of *Our Age* (the title of his recent book) or *Our Sort of People*. They assumed that whatever the economic state of the nation, it would be run by and for them.

The chattering classes are more meritocratic and permeable than the traditional ruling class (which itself is much more permeable than is sometimes realized). But they have their own hegemonic values and manners, which had been accepted in one way or another by previous Prime Ministers, whatever their origins—and which Thatcher rejected. She appealed over the heads of the clerisy to the common people of England. Her electoral victories were

thanks to the "C2s"—in adman-speak, the newly prosperous upper working class—and the lower middle class, who wanted to become more prosperous still through a promised enterprise culture and lower taxation. It was Thatcher's affinity with these voters and their aspirations that most enraged her critics.

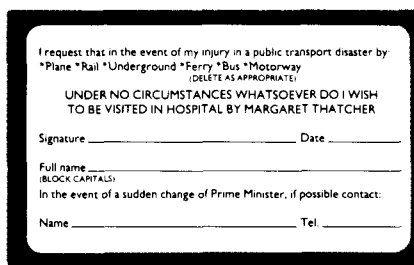
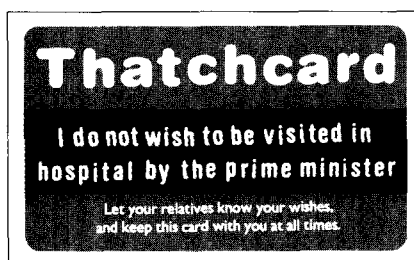
"Bourgeois triumphalism" was the memorable phrase coined by Peregrine Worsthorne ("petit-bourgeois triumphalism" might have been better still) to describe the flavor of the Thatcher years, with the ascent of the yuppies, of the C2s, of the "Essex Man," as one

arcane class consciousness lingers on—and in quarters that don't even know they are class-conscious.

If the hatred of Thatcher was fueled as much by straight snobbery as by intellectual snobbery, it was also fueled by plain disappointment. She was often said to have snubbed the trade unions as much as attacked them politically: there was no more "beer and sandwiches" at Number Ten when the union leaders were invited in to settle problems. As much to the point was the way that she snubbed the clerisy.

The higher intelligentsia had not merely had its own vision of society and how it should be improved. A social problem or injustice would be identified and researched by academics who would then agitate for a government commission, to be followed by legislation. "It was jobs for the intellectuals in a big way," Annan was paraphrased by one reporter as saying, and there was also the assumption that if any intervention was needed, the state would pick up the bill: "Mrs. Thatcher, of course, would have nothing to do with that, and she was dead right." More generally, the dream of his generation after 1945, as Annan puts it, had been an end to class war, with the nation "pulling together" instead of competing. In the 1970s that dream had turned into a nightmare of stagnation. And then Thatcher had offered her alternative vision of a highly competitive society, and the voters had liked what she offered. They, too, wanted a high-competition, low-tax country—and they didn't want high culture, however much we highly cultivated people would have liked them to.

SINCE AS FAR back as it could remember, the left-liberal intelligentsia had suffered from a problem that Alfred Braunthal once called the "mystic cult of The Masses, who always feel the right way and always act the wrong way." Now it wasn't even clear that they felt the right way. Essex Man, the upwardly mobile C2s, all those who had voted for Thatcher, had gone and let their cultural betters down. In the process and by their reaction, those betters—the Oxford dons, NW1, the 20 June Group—showed their true colors. They might have unconsciously quoted Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*: "Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good



Thatchcard, front and back: many Britons wouldn't leave home without it

newspaper coined him, from the county just outside London. But at least Worsthorne was writing from the romantic right, unashamedly reactionary and snobbish. Much more extraordinary, and telling, were the terms in which Thatcher's liberal enemies denounced her. The playwright Peter Nichols dismissed her supporters as taxi drivers and rich butchers. Lady Warnock, the philosopher who is head of Girton College, Cambridge, was more forthright still. The way Thatcher shouted people out was characteristically lower middle class, she said. Her clothes and hair were insufferable, "packaged together in a way that's not exactly vulgar, just *low*." And there it was. Margaret Thatcher is rather "common." That is a word whose nuances are almost impossible to explain to an American audience (and so much the better for the Americans) but that is still crucial in England. The ancient,



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example, what on earth is the use of them?"

It was this resentment—this sense of rejection by the masses who had not set a good example—that ran like a thread through the intellectual hostility to Thatcherism. What did the novelist John Fowles mean when he complained about "the self-centred notions of the new conservatism. . . . This rightward and selfward tendency in most of the electorate since the 1950s," when he condemned "personal advantage, the ethos of the grocer's daughter" (that snobbery again!)? Or what did the minor poet Adrian Mitchell mean when he shrieked that "Thatcher's vision is a little plastic credit card"? Thatcherism meant "bulging plastic awnings . . . above unisex aerobic centres, sado-video centres and plonk bars. And it was under Thatcher that you were first offered Filofaxes, mangetout peas, jacuzzis and compact bloody discs." This was it: consumerism, yuppie-dom, "bourgeois triumphalism"—or, to put it another way, more people than ever given money to spend and the freedom to spend it as they chose. The trouble was that all too few of them spent it in the politically correct—or culturally correct—way.

In some ways Thatcher's career ended in failure, as (it has been said) all political careers do. By this year macro-economic Thatcherism seemed far from a success, even in its own terms. Income taxes had been significantly cut (it might be remembered that the highest marginal rates of British income tax when Thatcher became Prime Minister were 83 percent on earned income and 90 percent on "unearned," or investment, income), and yet the amount of the national income taken in all taxes, direct and indirect, and spent by the state was as high as ever. The former union stranglehold on British industry—unique among Western countries—had been broken, but when Thatcher departed, the country was in a deepening recession. Any increase in productivity in the 1980s had largely come from layoffs in overmanned industries, rather than from genuine efficiency.

There is no doubt that Thatcher had become deeply unpopular by last year—in the country at large, among the political class in European capitals (though not in the White House), and,

fatally, among her immediate colleagues. Not only did she feel for them an outsider's disdain, but she had treated them with something like contempt. In late 1989 Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, resigned over economic policy—and over whether it should be dictated by himself or by Sir Alan Walters, a member of her kitchen cabinet. A year later Sir Geoffrey Howe resigned from the government and unleashed the closest he could to a fierce attack on Margaret Thatcher. The Labour politician Denis Healey once said in the House of Commons that to be attacked by Howe was like being savaged by a dead sheep; on this occasion the dead sheep bit back. This emboldened Michael Heseltine to challenge Thatcher, as she had challenged Heath fifteen years earlier. She beat him in a one-to-one ballot, but thanks to the quaintly complicated electoral system there had to be a second ballot. On Wednesday night her Cabinet colleagues told her that she must withdraw in favor of another candidate in order to avert the frightful prospect of a Heseltine victory.

And so on that Thursday morning we were wherever we were—in my case the offices of *The Sunday Telegraph*, shortly before ten o'clock, when someone rushed over to look at the television screen, and I looked up to hear the news. That day there were celebrations all over north London and north Oxford—literally, actors and writers calling one another and meeting to open the champagne. Perhaps they drank too soon.

In contrast to 1975, in 1990 the Tories didn't follow their own logic, which would have meant choosing Heseltine as leader. They chose instead John Major, a perfect compromise candidate, a man who had risen without trace, certainly without any of Thatcher's blinding conviction. There was an almost audible sigh of relief from within the government when Thatcher resigned. A hidden story of the Thatcher years, it became clear, was just how badly she had treated her colleagues. (It was always said, and I can believe, that she was, in contrast, consideration and kindness itself to her personal staff.) As someone put it when Geoffrey Howe resigned, he had been seeing something of Margaret Thatcher most days for most of fifteen years, and you

couldn't really blame him if he wanted a break.

But if there was this unconscious relief, there was no intention of abandoning the Thatcher legacy in its entirety. Whatever her precise failures, she had had a much broader success. It could be measured—as some of her enemies were honest enough to admit—by her stature in almost every foreign capital, and thus the renewed respect for her country.

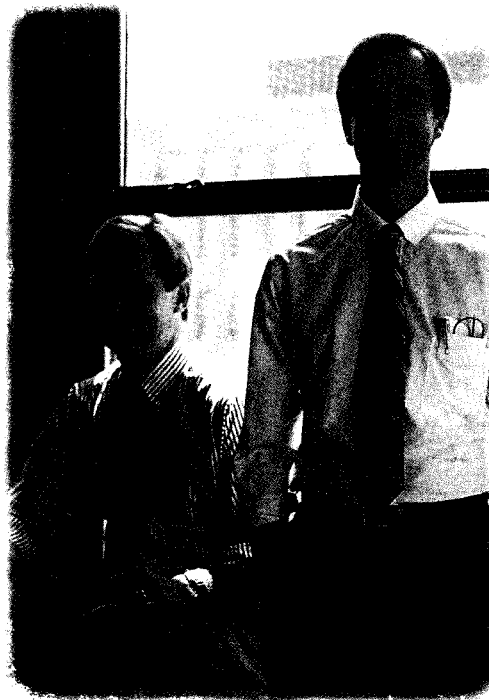
Still more it could be measured in the subtitle of the political commentator Peter Jenkins's book *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution: The Ending of the Socialist Era*. It could be measured, that is, by the new-look Labour Party, which had permanently forsworn not merely full-blooded socialism but also high taxation and central planning.

These things might have come about without Margaret Thatcher, but it is hard to see how. Of course she coincided with the right historical moment, which culminated in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, but it is all too easy to imagine what might have happened to England in the 1980s under another Prime Minister. The most dishonest of all her enemies are those who openly or secretly welcomed her achievements but resented the way she brought them about, as though a less formidable, abrasive, and exasperating personality would or could have done so. As they say, if you want the meat you have to pay for the bones. In the years that preceded Thatcher's coming to power, it had been a commonplace of British political debate anywhere outside the extreme left that the unions had to be tamed, inflation curbed, and economic initiative revived. Thatcher was entitled to look back on her eleven years in office and ask, "Why should our endeavor be so loved, and the performance so loathed?"

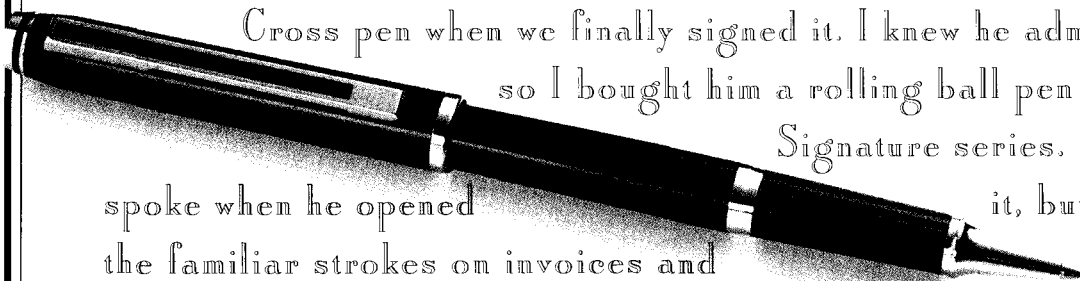
And loathed as she was by the self-satisfied chattering classes, she had taught them no end of a lesson. She gave more people what they wanted than any national leader before, whether educated NW1 (myself included) liked what it was they wanted or not. She was in that sense the most democratic and egalitarian Prime Minister her country has ever had. And anyway, what's wrong with compact bloody discs?

—Geoffrey Wheatcroft

My Friend, the Bookworm from Hoboken.



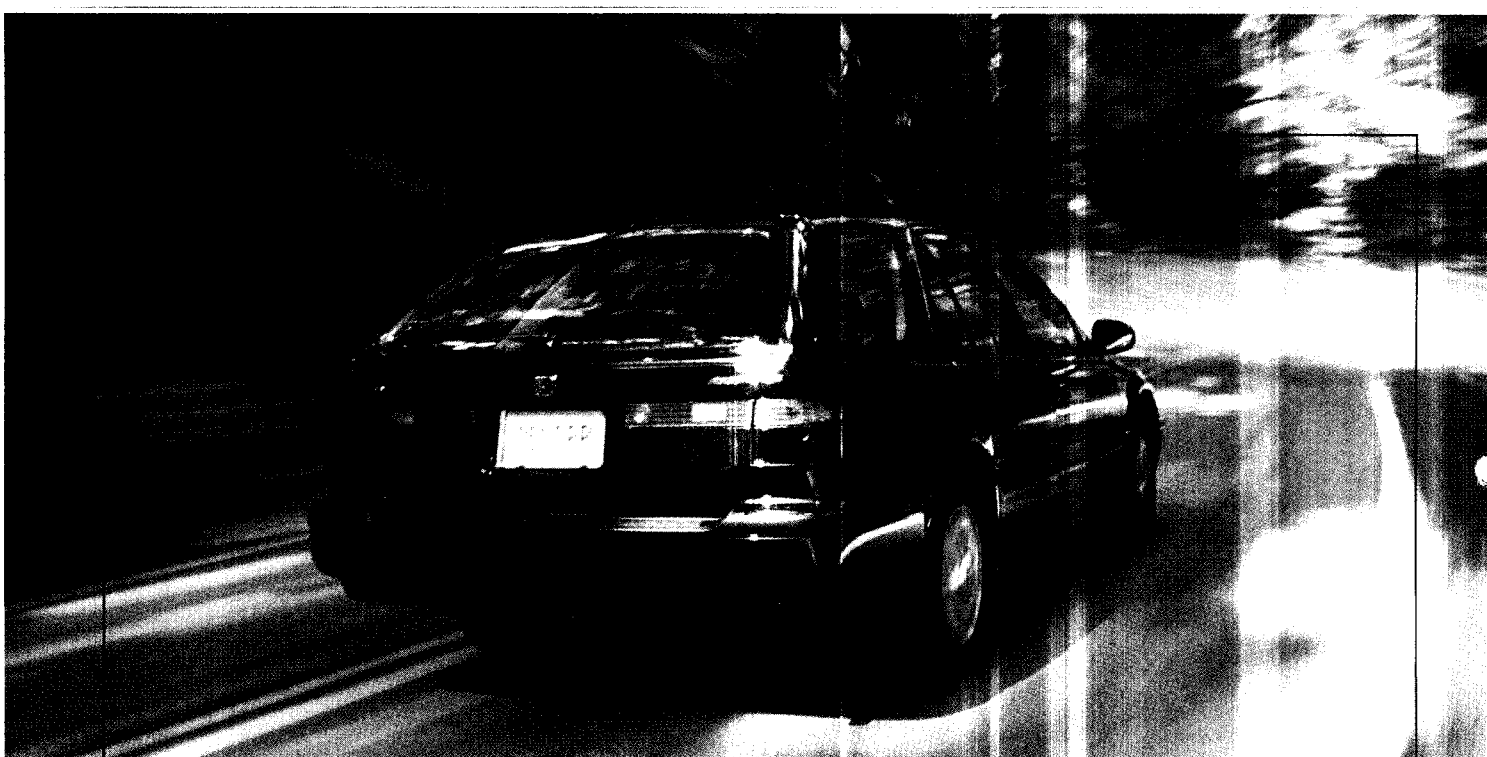
I had never met anyone who considered textbooks summer reading material. I also never met anyone who had more than two pocket protectors. He was quiet, but confident. So confident, he had our business cards printed before the lease was written. I gave him the Cross pen when we finally signed it. I knew he admired mine, so I bought him a rolling ball pen from their Signature series. He barely spoke when he opened it, but I've seen the familiar strokes on invoices and memos. I think he'll always have it with him. Actually, I know he will. It's the only one he keeps in his pocket protector.



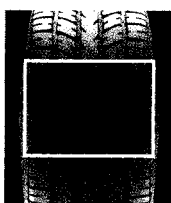
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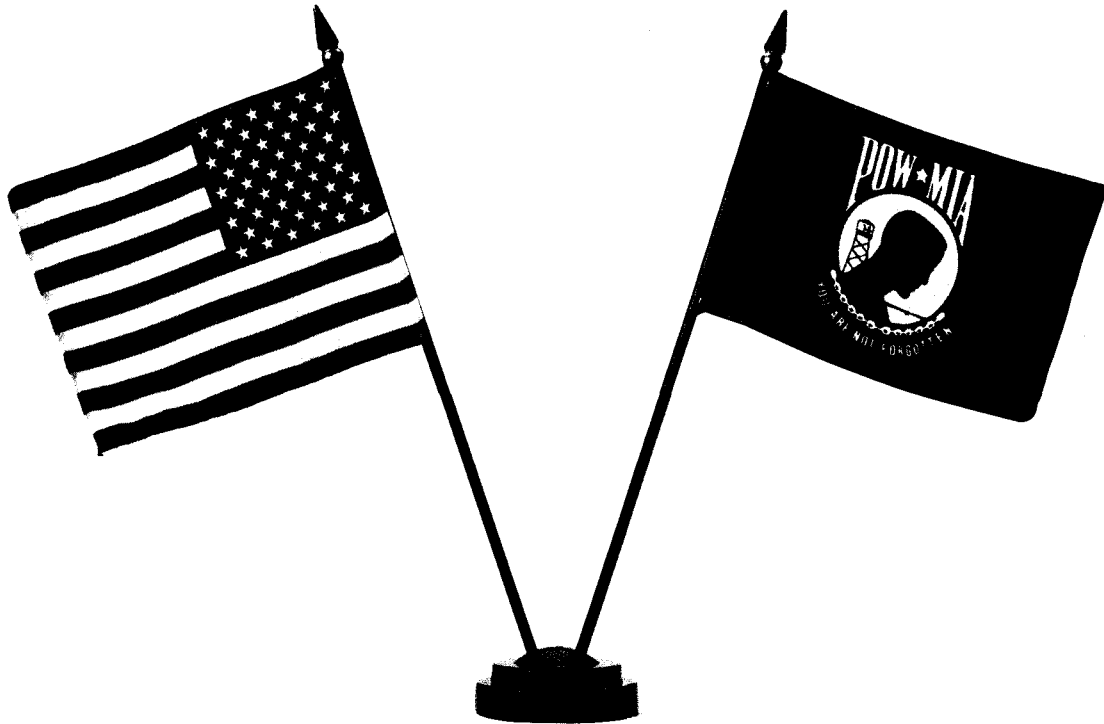


GOODYEAR

THE BEST TIRES IN THE WORLD HAVE GOODYEAR WRITTEN ALL OVER THEM.

THE POW/MIA MYTH

BY H. BRUCE FRANKLIN



According to a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll, 69 percent of the American people believe that U.S. prisoners of war are still being held in Southeast Asia, nearly twenty years after the United States called its troops home. They hold this belief because of the cynical way the Nixon and subsequent administrations exploited the POW/MIA issue. And where Washington left off, Hollywood picked up, until fact and fantasy got hopelessly mingled in people's minds. Herewith the story of one of the most stubborn mass irrationalities of our times.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ONLY ONE FLAG OTHER THAN THE STAR-SPANGLED Banner has ever flown over the White House. There on one day every year since 1982 has fluttered the black-and-white POW/MIA flag, designed and distributed by the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia.

The endless flow of visitors to the rotunda of the nation's Capitol streams past an object that may seem somewhat incongruous beneath the epic paintings and amid the heroic statues: the POW/MIA flag, the only flag displayed in the Capitol, given this ongoing position of hon-

or by vote of Congress in 1987. This banner thus displays to the world our nation's faith in the flag's central image, the silhouette of a handsome American prisoner of war, his head slightly bowed to reveal behind him the ominous shape of a guard tower. A strand of barbed wire cuts across just below his firm chin. Underneath runs the motto "YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN."

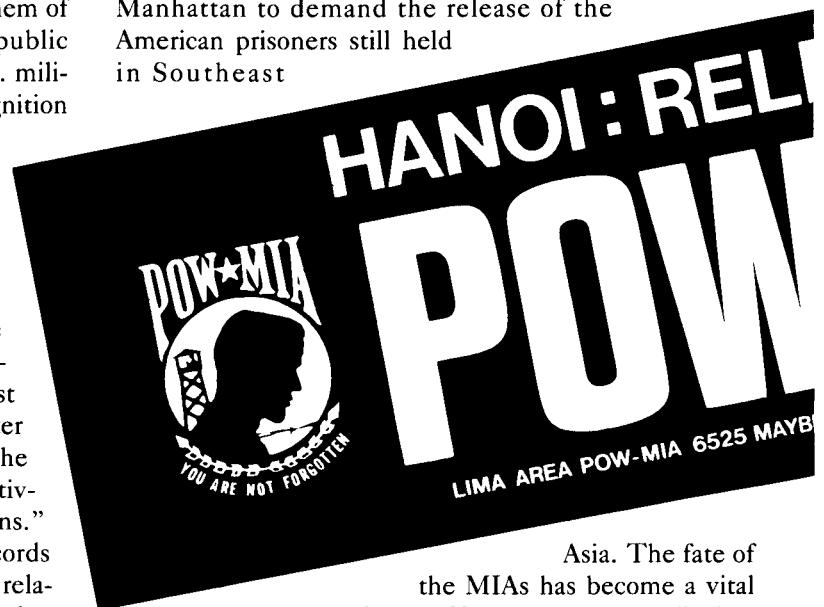
Each year since 1982 the U.S. government has officially declared it is operating "on the assumption that at least some Americans are still held captive." In 1983, ten years after the last official U.S. combat in Indochina, the President of the United States solemnly pledged that the fate

of the POW/MIAs had become "the highest national priority." The following year Michael Dukakis, governor of a state that had been in the forefront of the movement against the Vietnam War, signed a decree authorizing that the POW/MIA flag fly above the statehouse lawn for a year. Today in Massachusetts every city and town must fly the POW/MIA flag over at least one municipal building and over all police and fire stations, while all state vehicles must display the POW/MIA logo. This policy is now typical of many states, and the flag is also a familiar sight at rest stops and toll plazas along state highways. Congress and the President every year enact legislation proclaiming National POW/MIA Recognition Day. By 1988 laws mandating observance of this day had been enacted by the legislatures and governors of forty-six states; the last four states fell into line by 1990. Last May, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney sent a directive to the Secretary of each branch of the armed forces and to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff reminding them of the preeminent importance of "the POW/MIA public awareness program" and specifying that every U.S. military installation should fly the flag, conduct Recognition Day ceremonies, and arrange for presentations from the National League of Families.

Official homage to the Americans still allegedly captive in Southeast Asia is no mere ritual. It is also a basis—at least an ostensible basis—for foreign policy. Last year the U.S. government boasted that it "has kept the live prisoner issue at the forefront of negotiations" with Vietnam and reiterated that "the POW/MIA issue is a matter of highest national priority," which can be resolved only after "the fullest possible accounting for the missing, the return of all Americans who may still be held in captivity, and the repatriation of all recoverable remains." Vietnam having signed the Cambodian peace accords in October, the main obstacle to normalizing U.S. relations with Vietnam is that nation's failure to meet these demands. Ever since 1982, under the Reagan Administration, the Department of Defense has issued annually a *POW-MIA Fact Book*, which states the official rationale for this policy. From 1984 through 1989 the key wording ran, "It would be irresponsible to rule out the possibility that live Americans are being held." In 1990, under the Bush Administration, the phrasing became less equivocal: "The U.S. Government's efforts are predicated on the assumption that some are still alive."

Devotion to American POWs in Indochina permeates the society, running especially strong in the working class. Throughout the nation, particularly in shopping malls and white working-class neighborhoods, the black-and-white flag often flies beneath or beside the Stars and Stripes. Bumper stickers, buttons, and T-shirts proclaim, AMERICAN POW/MIAS ARE ALIVE IN VIETNAM, ONLY HANOI KNOWS, RELEASE OUR POW/MIAS, and POWS NEVER HAVE A NICE DAY. A permanent vigil, staffed

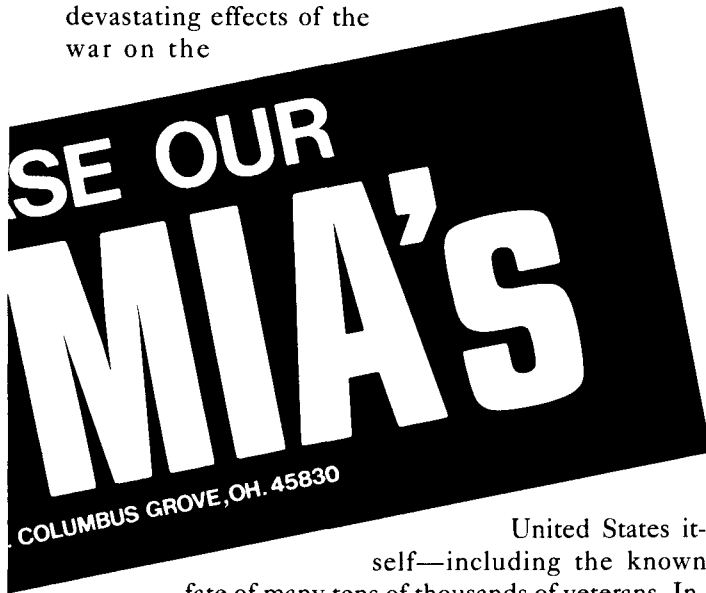
mainly by Vietnam veterans, is held at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Millions of Americans have worn POW/MIA bracelets, which are still sold by the thousands each year. The flag has waved over the General Motors parts-distribution center in Bensalem, Pennsylvania, ever since the United Auto Workers local there threatened to strike if it was not flown every day. Above the New York Stock Exchange, facing the visitors' gallery, hangs a large POW/MIA flag. Children of all ages play P.O.W.: Prisoners of War on Nintendo. A board game dedicated to the POW/MIAs "still alive and being held against their will" is played with 2,477 cards, each inscribed with a different serviceman's "name, rank, branch of service, casualty date, and country where lost or captured." Christmas trees are adorned with POW/MIA ornaments. This past September some 8,000 bikers staged the third annual Ride for Freedom, a motorcycle cavalcade that roared through New Jersey and Manhattan to demand the release of the American prisoners still held in Southeast



Asia. The fate of the MIAs has become a vital concern of many Vietnam veterans, displacing their problems with unemployment, homelessness, Agent Orange, and inadequate medical care.

How could anyone, especially any loyal American, doubt that there are still U.S. prisoners of war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia? Hundreds of millions of people around the world have actually seen these forgotten heroes, abandoned by their government, emaciated, tortured, enslaved but unbowed—on movie and television screens. Their existence proves undeniably the cruelty and inhumanity of the Asian Communists, the fortitude and heroism of the American fighting man, and the nobility of the cause for which the United States fought in Indochina. David Cline, who was wounded when his position was overrun in a battle at the same time and place as the one depicted toward the end of the movie *Platoon*, describes one aspect of this phenomenon succinctly: "Americans want to believe that we were the good guys and those rotten gooks are still making our boys grow rice."

The POW/MIA myth has had a profound political, cultural, and psychological influence on American society that continues to deepen, although the likelihood of finding any living POWs wanes with each passing year. Those not possessed by the faith may find it difficult to comprehend its power. There has yet to be any credible evidence that any prisoners were withheld in Indochina, and even if some were held, their number could not have been more than a few dozen at the very most. The supposed fate of this conjectural small group might therefore seem to be almost incidental compared with the catastrophic effects of the war on the ruined nation of Vietnam, whose casualties ran into the millions and whose own MIAs still number more than 200,000, and also with the devastating effects of the war on the



United States itself—including the known fate of many tens of thousands of veterans. Indeed, for every missing man who the U.S. government at any time claimed might possibly have been a captive in Indochina after the war, there are now probably at least a thousand homeless Vietnam veterans on U.S. streets—to whom some people refer as “M.I.A.: Missing in America.” Gene Hackman, Chuck Norris, Sylvester Stallone, David Carradine, and the other saviors whom Hollywood has sent on quests to rescue imprisoned Vietnam veterans would have a more realistic chance of success in the United States, where hundreds of thousands are or have been incarcerated in jails and prisons.

Counting the Unaccounted-For

TO KEEP ONE’S BEARINGS THROUGH THE THICKETS that lie ahead, these facts will be helpful:

- A total of 2,273 Americans are still “unaccounted for” from the war in Indochina.
- Approximately half this total (1,101) were never considered to be either missing in action or prisoners of war. They were known at the time of their loss to have been killed in action; they are listed as “unaccounted for” only because their bodies have not been recovered.

- Today only one man is still officially listed as either missing in action or a prisoner of war, and he is known to have died about a quarter of a century ago.

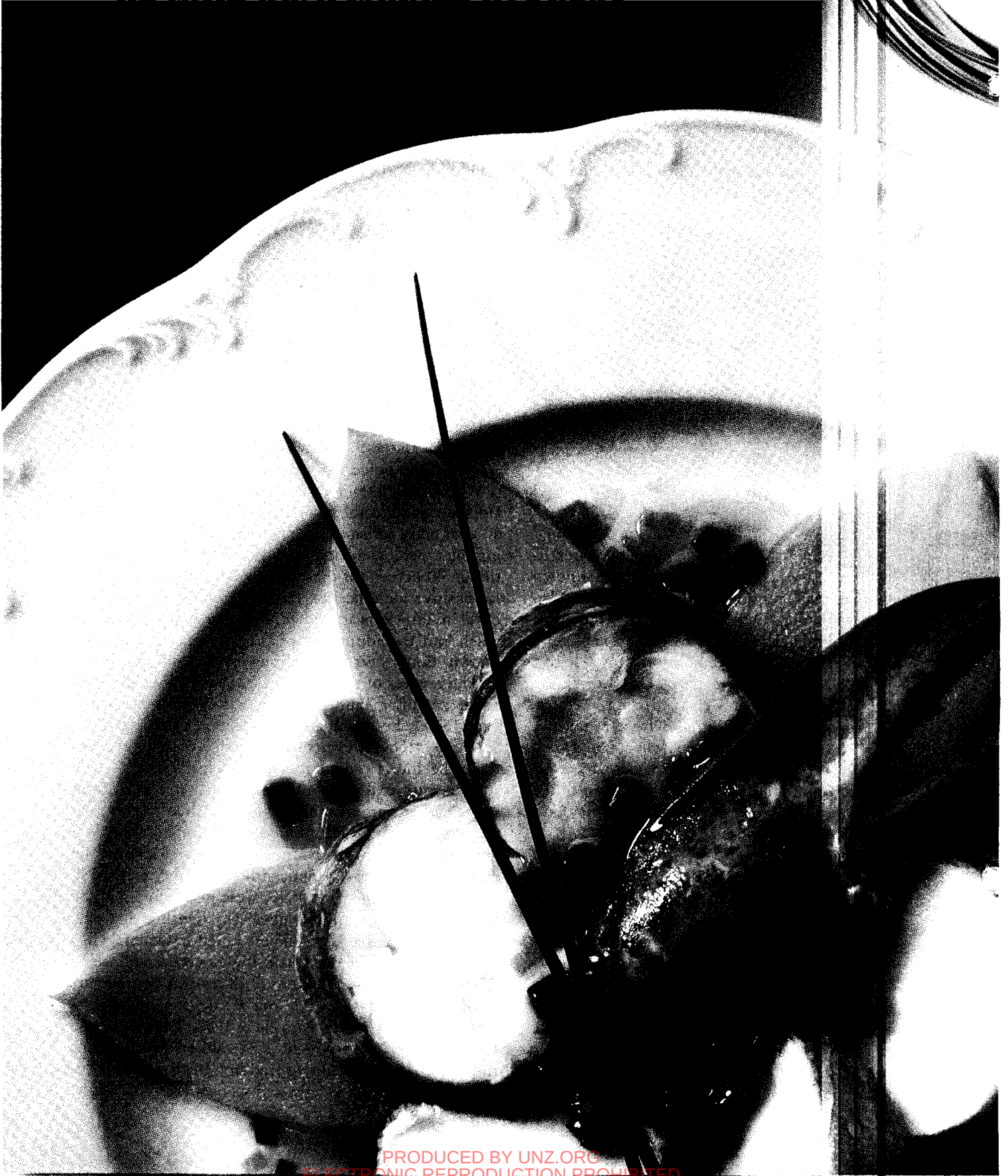
In all major wars many combatants die without being identified or having their bodies recovered. Approximately 78,750 Americans are still unaccounted for from the Second World War, and approximately 8,170 are unaccounted for from the Korean War. So the number unaccounted for from the Vietnam War would seem surprisingly small, especially since about 80 percent of the missing were airmen lost over the sea, remote mountains, or tropical rain forest, often in planes that exploded at supersonic speeds, while most of the rest disappeared amid confused fighting in dense jungle. In fact, the proportion of unaccounted-for Americans to the total killed in action is far smaller for the Vietnam War than for any previous war in the nation’s history—even though this was its longest war, included protracted “secret” wars in Laos and Cambodia whose very existence was denied by the U.S. government, and ended with every battlefield in the possession of the enemy. For the Second World War, after which the United States was free to explore every battlefield, the 78,750 still unaccounted for represent 19.4 percent of the total 405,399 killed. For the Korean War, more than 15 percent of the dead are still unaccounted for. In contrast, the unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War constitute less than four percent of the 58,152 killed.

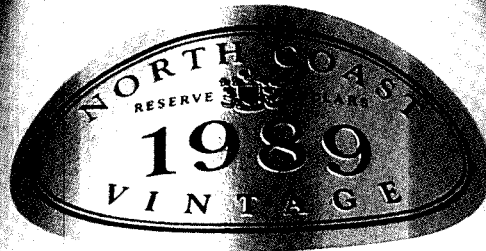
What is the likelihood of finding and identifying aviators lost under combat conditions? A U.S. Navy study of all fatal non-combat accidents from 1969 to 1975 involving the type of combat aircraft flown in Vietnam showed that in 40 percent of the cases remains were insufficient for positive identification through autopsy, even though naval investigators arrived on the scene within hours of a crash and the identities of the airmen were already known. Bodies left in Indochina would additionally suffer the ravages of the tropical climate, with its monsoon rains, engulfing mud, and vegetative overgrowth, and would likely be torn apart and scattered by animals.

Speedy recovery even of those bodies that might eventually be found cannot reasonably be expected, given that despite extensive prior searches, the dead from much earlier wars are still turning up. Almost every year the remains of Americans killed in the Second World War are discovered in the European countryside, and the crews of at least two American bombers that crashed in New Guinea in the early 1940s were finally found in the 1980s. Although there was never any question as to the site of death, remains of soldiers killed in General Custer’s 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn were still being found in 1985. The skeletons of thirty-two Confederate soldiers killed in the Civil War Battle of Glorieta Pass were unearthed in New Mexico in 1987. That same year the remains of twenty-eight U.S. soldiers killed during the War of 1812 were discovered in Canada.

Such grim facts highlight a misconception basic to the

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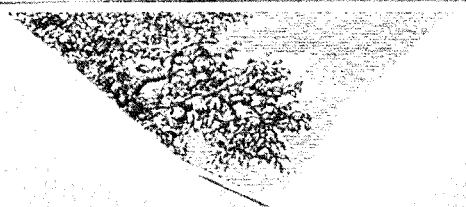


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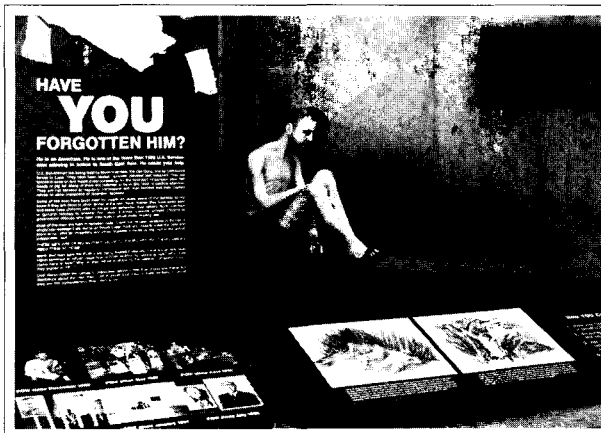
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POW/MIA issue. The total of 2,273 unaccounted-for in Indochina is quite misleading, because it includes those 1,101 who are known to have been killed in action in circumstances where their bodies could not be recovered. Their official designation is KIA/BNR—"killed in action, body not recovered." Crews of airplanes that exploded in the air or crashed within sight of their aircraft carriers, soldiers machine-gunned to death before the eyes of comrades unable to retrieve their bodies, or men so thoroughly blown apart that there were no retrievable remains—all these are listed in the total of "unaccounted for." This KIA/BNR category was never included with the missing in action during the Vietnam War; it was lumped together with the POW/MIA category only after the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement was signed.

So of the 2,273 unaccounted-for, only 1,172 were ever actually listed as POW/MIA. But the category POW/MIA itself was an unprecedented invention designed to suggest that each and every missing person might be a prisoner of war, even though most of those missing in action were lost under circumstances that made capture impossible. Previously, the designation POW applied only to those known or believed to be prisoners. It was quite distinct from the MIA category. While lumping these two designations together in most public announcements, the Department of Defense internally kept them separate throughout the war and its aftermath. The Pentagon listed as a POW anyone reported as a possible prisoner anywhere in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, or China at any time from 1964 to 1973, whether or not there was credible evidence of capture and even if there was evidence of subsequent death. After the 1973 Peace Agreement all but fifty-six men on this internal list were either released or reported to have died in captivity. Over the next three years analysis of these remaining cases resolved all but a handful.

Archived at the Capitol



The POW exhibit in the U.S. Capitol, 1970



The category POW/MIA itself was

an unprecedented invention

designed to suggest that each and

every missing person might be

a prisoner of war, even though most

of those missing in action

were lost under circumstances that

made capture impossible.

In the ensuing years exhaustive case-by-case investigation, together with the absence of contradictory evidence, has led the Department of Defense to make a presumptive finding of death for every single person on the combined POW/MIA list except one. This man is Air Force Captain (promoted after his loss to Colonel) Charles Shelton, who was shot down over Laos in April of 1965; according to the official U.S. position, Shelton is "listed as a prisoner of war as a symbolic gesture of the Administration's commitment to this issue." In discussing his case the Defense Department notes, "Shelton is the only American serviceman the U.S. Government still lists as a POW; this is for symbolic purposes as intelligence reports indicate that he . . . died in captivity in the mid-1960s." All other known or presumed prisoners of war have been either returned or determined to have died in captivity.

Every responsible investigation conducted since the end of the war has reached the same conclusion: there is no credible evidence that live Americans are being

held against their will in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, or China. Most telling are those studies initiated from the opposing point of view.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, one of the principal figures in spreading the notion that Americans were still being held captive in Indochina was Gillespie "Sonny" Montgomery, a conservative representative from Mississippi, recognized at the time as being more outspoken about this belief "than any other member of Congress," according to *The Washington Post*. His fervor persuaded the House in 1975 to create the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia and to name him as its chair. After fifteen months of investigation, with access to every case file and all classified information, extensive hearings recorded in five volumes, and a fact-finding trip to Southeast Asia, the committee issued

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its final report in 1976, presenting the unequivocal conclusions that "no Americans are still being held alive as prisoners in Indochina, or elsewhere, as a result of the war in Indochina," and that "because of the nature and circumstances in which many Americans were lost in combat in Indochina, a total accounting by the Indochinese Governments is not possible and should not be expected." Confronted with overwhelming evidence, Montgomery ruefully confessed his now-shattered belief in live prisoners had been "based more on hope than fact and more on rumors than hard evidence," for "like so many others I wanted to believe they were alive, so I did."

Three years later the National Defense University published a book-length study of the POW/MIA issue and its history, written by Navy Captain Douglas L. Clarke, of the National War College. A veteran of 300 combat missions in Indochina, many flown as commander of a carrier-based attack-bomber squadron, Clarke had close friends among the missing in action and had served for eighteen months in the Navy's office of the Special Assistant for Prisoner of War Matters. Clarke found himself not only in agreement with the conclusions of the House Select Committee but also thoroughly convinced that the entire "matter of the missing men has worked against the best interests of the United States," the men, and their families, as he stated in his final paragraph.

Whether there will ever be an adequate accounting of the men missing in Southeast Asia is extremely doubtful. There never was one in any previous conflict. The Government did the families—and therefore the lost men—a tragic disservice by encouraging the belief that there would be such an accounting in this war.

For eight years the Reagan Administration kept fomenting the issue of Americans supposedly held in captivity in Indochina. Yet its final report on the matter, jointly prepared by the Department of Defense and the Department of State and released just a few hours before Reagan left office (but never published by the Government Printing Office, listed as a government document, or made available to government-document depositories), was unable to cite any evidence of unrepatriated live POWs, despite intense scrutiny of "several million captured documents"; interrogation of "over one quarter of a million prisoners and defectors" during the war; thorough debriefing of all returning U.S. and allied prisoners; interrogation of thousands of refugees, including "defectors from Vietnam's security services, military and diplomatic corps"; the use of "national technical systems" (satellites, spy flights, and electronic monitoring); and "a special team deployed in Southeast Asia." The report was forced to state outright, "We have yet to find conclusive evidence of the existence of live prisoners, and returnees at Operation Homecoming in 1973 knew of no Americans who were left behind in captivity."

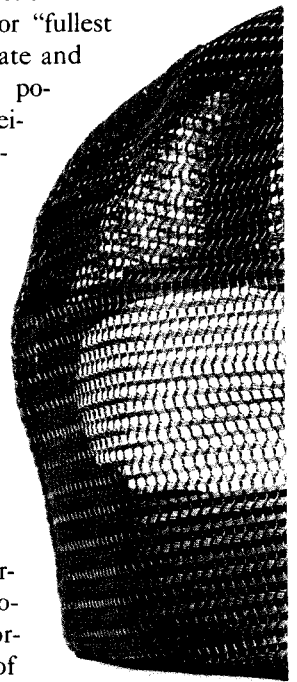
Full Accounting and Live POWs

THE MAIN DEMAND MADE BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT on the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia is that they provide "the fullest possible accounting" for all Americans missing in action during the many years of U.S. warfare in Indochina. The U.S. position, as stated in the lead headline of the 1990 *POW-MIA Fact Book*, is that "THE INDO-CHINESE HOLD THE ANSWERS," and that because they refuse to tell the United States everything they know, the United States is justified in acting "on the assumption that at least some Americans are still held captive."

This logic confuses the issue of live POWs with the issue of accountability. The thorny question of what constitutes an adequate, acceptable, or "fullest possible" accounting is rife with debate and ambiguity. Many arguments—ethical, political, and legal—could be made on either side of the proposition that the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia owe the government of the United States more information than they have provided. One's position on this question might very well be influenced by one's view of the history and justice of America's war against these nations. Laos and Vietnam have returned more than 300 sets of remains, and both countries have participated with the United States in a number of joint searches of crash sites. Vietnam has issued numerous diplomatic and public reports documenting what it argues are extraordinary efforts to determine the fate of the missing and to locate and return the remains of Americans who were killed. The United States aggressively disputes Vietnam's arguments. But, in any case, there is an enormous difference between retaining information and retaining prisoners.

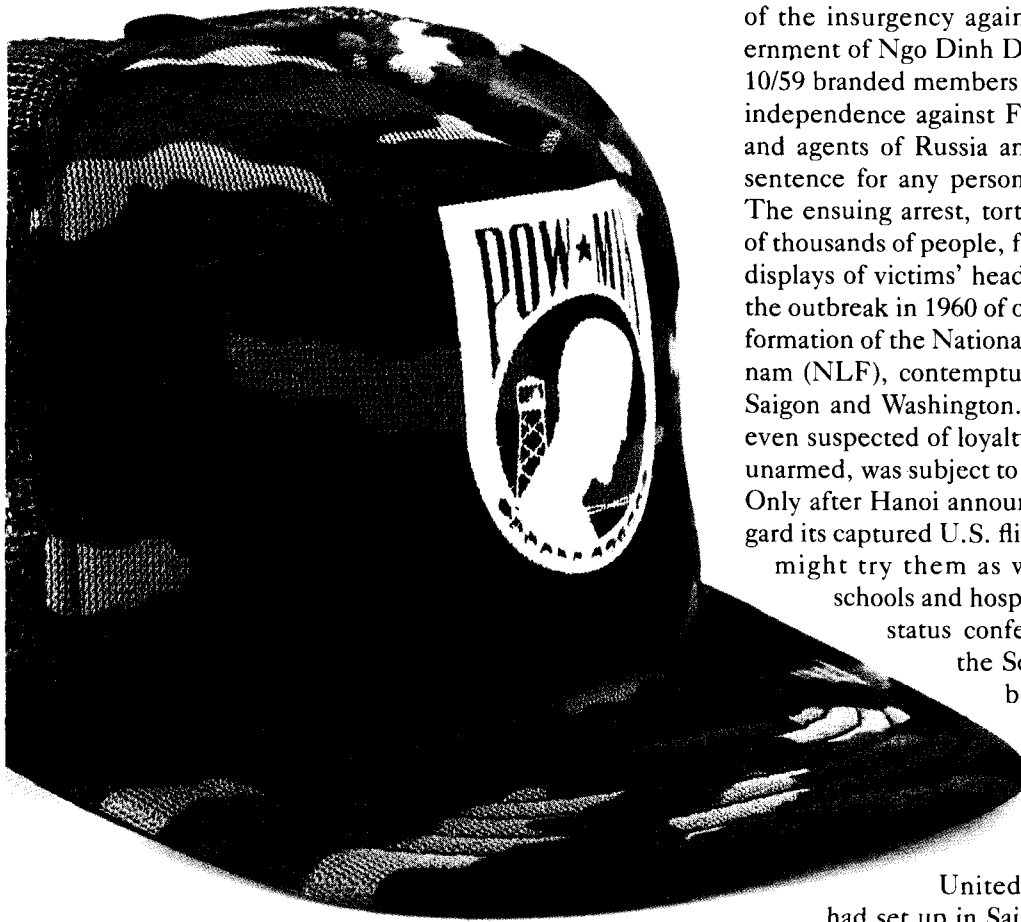
The claim that "the Indochinese hold the answers" is at best disingenuous. How could they possibly know the circumstances of the loss of every missing American? The House Select Committee discovered hundreds of cases for which the United States was demanding an accounting although there was virtually no possibility whatsoever that the Indochinese governments could have any information. One of the many examples:

On February 2, 1968, a UH-1H helicopter with five U.S. Army men on board crashed into a mountain and exploded into flames while making a ground-controlled approach to Danang Air Base, according to airborne observers and those on the ground. A thoroughly trained Army crash-investigation team concluded that "everyone perished in the crash." The handful of charred and fractured



bone fragments that they could collect were determined to be useless for identification by the Army mortuary, which therefore disposed of them by incineration. The five crewmen were classified as MIA, and the Vietnamese were asked to account for each of them.

The committee concluded that listing such cases, "for which no accounting can be expected," may have convinced "the Indochinese leaders that the United States has deliberately requested information which they cannot furnish in order to embarrass them or to prevent meaningful talks."



The Origin of the Issue

WHEN RICHARD NIXON ACCEPTED THE REPUBLICAN presidential nomination in 1968, he vowed, "If the war is not ended when the people choose in November. . . I pledge to you tonight that the first-priority foreign-policy objective of our next Administration will be to bring an honorable end to the war in Vietnam." This pledge was vital to his winning the presidency in a nation that had come to consider the war at best futile and possibly catastrophic. How many people living in America in 1968 could have predicted that Richard Nixon would protract the Indo-

china war into 1973? Perhaps even fewer than those who remembered that back in 1954 he had been one of the key figures in engineering the events that led to the war. And who could possibly have predicted that President Nixon would rely on a brand-new issue—the fate of American prisoners of war and missing in action—to sustain the war that had defeated President Johnson and presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey?

Disturbing questions about prisoners in Vietnam had indeed already emerged, but these concerned mainly people captured by the United States and Saigon, not those held by Hanoi and the southern guerrillas. In fact, the fate of Saigon's prisoners had been one of the causes of the insurgency against the South Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem, whose infamous 1959 Law 10/59 branded members of the forces that had fought for independence against France as "Communists, traitors, and agents of Russia and China" and decreed a death sentence for any person actively resisting Diem's rule. The ensuing arrest, torture, and execution of hundreds of thousands of people, featuring portable guillotines and displays of victims' heads and intestines, helped lead to the outbreak in 1960 of organized armed struggle and the formation of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF), contemptuously labeled the Viet Cong by Saigon and Washington. As the war developed, anyone even suspected of loyalty to the NLF, whether armed or unarmed, was subject to torture and summary execution. Only after Hanoi announced, in 1966, that it did not regard its captured U.S. fliers as prisoners of war and that it might try them as war criminals for bombing its

schools and hospitals was any semblance of POW status conferred on captured insurgents in the South. Soon the American public began to learn something about their actual treatment. Among many disturbing books published in early 1968 were two that exposed the barbaric treatment of prisoners by the

United States and the government it had set up in Saigon. Prominent U.S. clergymen published *In the Name of America*, a chronicle of U.S. war crimes in Vietnam, with several sections devoted to the torture, mutilation, and murder of combatant and civilian prisoners. Next came *Against the Crime of Silence*, the proceedings of the International War Crimes Tribunal held during 1967 in Stockholm and Copenhagen, with extended testimony by U.S. veterans about their participation in the systematic torture and execution of prisoners by both U.S. and Saigon soldiers and officials.

In February of 1968 the issue exploded into the consciousness of tens of millions of Americans, as they watched, in their own homes, the chief of the Saigon national police execute a manacled NLF prisoner. In a perfectly framed sequence Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc

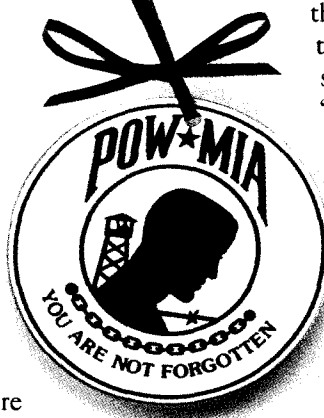
Loan unholstered a snub-nosed revolver and placed its muzzle to the prisoner's right temple. The prisoner's head jolted, a spurt of blood gushed out of his left temple, and he collapsed in death. A decade later this image, with roles reversed, would be transformed into the central metaphor of a Hollywood production crucial to re-imaging the history of the Vietnam War and its POWs: *The Deer Hunter*. And yet the original image remained so potent in the popular imagination that further efforts to reverse it continued at least through the 1980s.

With increasing horror, Americans soon witnessed even worse pictures and accounts of U.S. and Saigon soldiers torturing and slaughtering prisoners, not only combatants captured in battle but also civilians rounded up in sweeps through villages. As early as May of 1968 came the first published descriptions of the My Lai massacre of March, in which U.S. soldiers had killed hundreds of villagers after raping and sodomizing the young women and using babies for target practice. The full story, including horrifying photographs taken by one of the GIs, would not appear in the general U.S. media until late in 1969. The CIA's Phoenix program, designed to wipe out the insurgent infrastructure by rounding up, imprisoning, and assassinating tens of thousands of suspects, was launched in mid-1968. By the end of the year Nguyen Van Thieu, the head of the Saigon regime, boasted that Phoenix had already killed 18,393 people; U.S. intelligence officers attached to Phoenix later testified that they never saw any of its prisoners survive interrogation. Enemy soldiers captured by U.S. forces were, in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, turned over to the Saigon government, whose appalling prison camps were gradually being exposed to American readers and viewers. The American public even saw photographs of the notorious tiger cages of Con Son Island, where the few survivors were almost all permanently disfigured and severely crippled by torture.

In this context the incoming Nixon Administration decided to make the American prisoners and missing a major issue. Five days after Richard Nixon's inauguration, his representative introduced it at the Paris peace talks. A month later the Defense and State departments began laying the groundwork for a tremendous campaign at

home. Although one possible benefit of this new controversy might have been to neutralize some of the outrage about what was being done to Vietnamese prisoners, that was not its main purpose. Throughout Nixon's first term the issue of POWs and MIAs served mainly as an indispensable device for continuing the war, functioning on the domestic front as a potent counterforce to the anti-war movement and providing an ingenious tool for building insurmountable roadblocks within the peace talks. And then the issue would be transmuted into a major obstacle to normalized relations for more than eighteen years after the 1973 peace accords.

Domestically, the issue was a masterstroke. After all, how else could any deeply emotional support for the war be generated? Certainly not by holding out the old, discredited promises of military victory. Although in the early stages of the war sentiment could be aroused to defend the "democracy" of Ngo Dinh Diem, who would be willing to fight and die for the notoriously corrupt generals ruling Saigon? But supporting their own POWs and MIAs was something loyal Americans could not oppose. It also seemed easy to understand, requiring no knowledge of the history of Vietnam and the war. One measure of the campaign's success was the sale of more than 50 million POW/MIA bumper stickers over the next four years. And once infused with this intense domestic support, the issue could be presented as a purely "humanitarian" question, thus transforming the peace negotiations into a stage for displaying the inhuman features of the enemy.



The "Go Public" Campaign

THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION'S "GO PUBLIC" campaign, designed explicitly to marshal public support for the early release of all American prisoners of war, was initiated on March 1, 1969, and officially launched on May 19 in a press conference held by Defense Secretary Melvin Laird. It was immediately and enthusiastically promoted by the media, which, in the relatively restrained language of *The New York Times* editorial staff, denounced "the Communist side" as "inhuman," asserted that "at least half of the 1,300 Americans missing in action in Vietnam are believed to be alive," and insisted that "the prisoner-of-war question is a humanitarian, not a political issue."

By the fall the POW/MIA campaign was receiving media attention and exerting political influence far out of proportion to the small number of its participants, especially in comparison with the millions taking part in the anti-war movement. The campaign consisted of a medley of astute publicity schemes staged by the Nixon

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White House, POW family organizations, Congress, and the Texas multimillionaire H. Ross Perot (a director of the Richard M. Nixon Foundation).

In September and October the media spotlighted three delegations of wives and parents of missing men who flew to Paris to demand meetings with the negotiators from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the NLF. On November 5 and 6 Congress unanimously passed and President Nixon signed a bill declaring November 9 a national day of prayer for U.S. prisoners of war in Vietnam. On November 9 United We Stand, an organization formed and chaired by H. Ross Perot, ran full-page advertisements featuring a picture of two small children praying, "Bring our Daddy home safe, sound and soon." Headlined "THE MAJORITY SPEAKS: RELEASE THE PRISONERS," the ads demanded that the

"North Vietnamese and Viet-Cong . . . Release the prisoners now." On November 13 and 14 the House Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the Committee on Foreign Affairs held hearings to denounce "the ruthlessness and cruelty of North Vietnam" and to provide a pep rally for a congressional resolution demanding the release of American POWs; no one with a dissenting view testified. In mid-December the resolution, which had received unanimous endorsement from the Senate, passed the House by a vote of 405-0 and was immediately exploited by U.S. negotiators in Paris. A few days later Perot had 152 wives and children flown to Paris, while his own jetliner, laden with Christmas presents for the POWs and filled with reporters, was used to stage a major media event in Laos.

During the campaign's formative first few months, in 1969, Richard G. Capen, Laird's deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, and other officials from the State and Defense departments had visited forty-five sites to conduct un-

publicized meetings with families of the missing men, thus shrewdly building a foundation among those who could most readily win heartfelt support from the American people. "We brought them together for the first time," Capen later boasted of this whirlwind national trip to organize the families.

The most productive meeting was held at a naval officers' club on a base near San Diego, where on March 26 the State and Defense departments' representatives conferred with selected wives from the Los Angeles area and a San Diego-area group of wives organized by Sybil Stockdale, whose husband was the highest-ranking naval officer imprisoned in Vietnam and who herself had been working closely with naval intelligence since May of 1966. By June, Stockdale had made herself the national coordinator of an organization she christened the National

League of Families of American Prisoners in Southeast Asia, linking groups of POW wives from various parts of the country. The following month she and several other selected POW family members met with Secretary of Defense Laird, and in December she and four other POW wives met with President Nixon, who pledged in their joint press conference that "this Government will do everything that it possibly can to separate out the prisoner issue and have it handled as it should be, as a separate issue on a humane basis."

In the spring of 1970 Sybil Stockdale received a phone call from Republican Senator Robert Dole, who asked whether she could "deliver 1,000 family members" to a POW/MIA "extravaganza" he was planning for May 1 in Constitution Hall if he were to help arrange government transportation for them. Dole pledged to orchestrate political support, putting Vice President Spiro Agnew and a bipartisan lineup of senators and representatives on the stage, and having Democratic Representative Clement Zablocki turn his Subcommittee on National

Five days after Richard Nixon's

inauguration, his representative

introduced the issue of American

prisoners and missing at the Paris

peace talks. A month later the

Defense and State departments began

laying the groundwork for a

tremendous campaign at home.



At a White House gala for former POWs, 1973



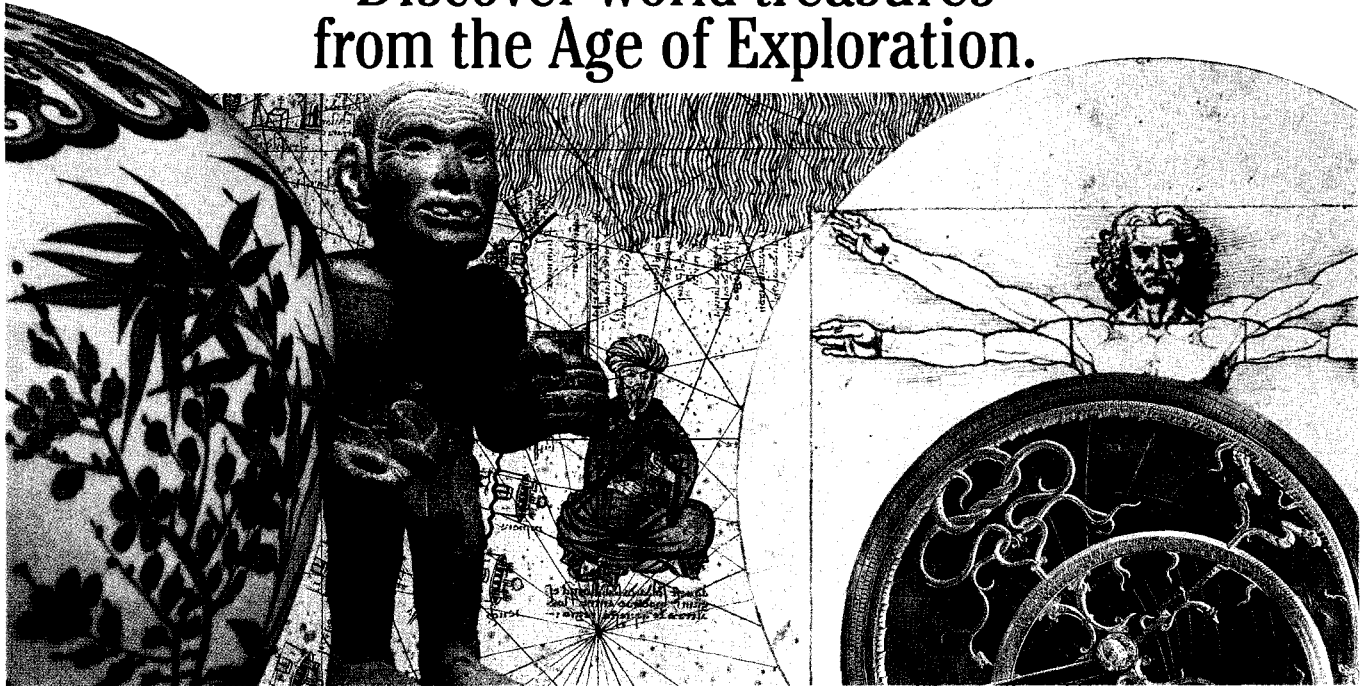
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Credits from left to right, details of: Blue and White Porcelain Jar with Plum and Bamboo Decorations, Ho-Am Art Museum, Kyunggi-Do, Korea; Xuhtecuhtli as an Old Man, CNCA-INAH, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; Atlas Catalan, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice; Astrolabe of Alphanus Severus, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg.

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Security Policy and Scientific Developments into a publicity forum just prior to the event. Dole, Stockdale, and Perot collaborated in organizing the festivities, aided by a host of senators and representatives, including such prominent Democrats as Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and Senator Edmund Muskie.

The day after the rally Stockdale presided in Washington over the meeting that transformed her network into the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. Its incorporating bylaws seem to have been decided upon three days earlier by Stockdale, a handful of wives chosen by her, and Charles Havens, an attorney with whom she had worked when he was in the Office of International Security Affairs. Within three weeks of its incorporation the National League received its IRS tax-exempt status as a "nonpartisan, humanitarian" organization, free long-distance WATS telephone service provided by the White House, and office space donated by the Reserve Officers Association.

From then until now the National League of Families has played changing but always crucial roles in the dramatization and evolution of the POW/MIA issue. Almost all its principal organizers and activists were wives or parents of career officers, not draftees (mainly because the vast majority of missing and captured men were flight officers), and the politics of the organization were dominated by their outlook, especially during the war. Receiving in its early years direct and indirect material support from the White House, the Department of Defense, and the Republican National Committee, the League (as it is known to activists in the movement) would have dramatically shifting relations with the government until it became, in the 1980s, the main official liaison between the Department of Defense and the American public on all POW/MIA matters, a function it still serves today.

Promoting the National League of Families was not the only accomplishment of the Zablocki subcommittee. It gave Perot a podium from which to lecture the media on its duties in the POW/MIA campaign. Perot also issued marching orders to Congress about its role in the media campaign, instructions that the subcommittee obediently agreed to implement. Its immediate task, he explained, would be to set up as a display in the Capitol a POW exhibit that he had designed and would finance.

On June 4, 1970, House Speaker John McCormack was the featured speaker during the televised ceremony inaugurating this display. The exhibit was designed, according to *The New York Times*, "to arouse public opinion in behalf of the release of American prisoners of war" and "to encourage the thousands of tourists" who would see it each day to raise this demand "in letters to North Viet-

namese leaders and members of Congress." At the center of the display were the figures of two American prisoners: "One sits in the corner of a bare cell, staring bleakly at an empty bowl and chopsticks on which a huge cockroach is perched. On the floor are other cockroaches and a large rat. The other figure lies in a bamboo cage, ankles shackled." By the end of the year this tableau was being set up in state capitols throughout the country, the *Steve Canyon* cartoon strip was featuring POW/MIA relatives in its daily sagas, ABC had presented a POW/MIA special, President Nixon had changed the official name of Veterans Day to Prisoner of War Day, the *Ladies' Home Journal* had published an article with a tear-out letter for readers to mail, and the U.S. Post Office, amid special fanfare by the President, had issued 135 million POW/MIA postage stamps.

America's vision of the war was being transformed. The actual photographs and TV footage of massacred villagers, napalmed children, Vietnamese prisoners being tortured and murdered, wounded GIs screaming in agony, and body bags being loaded for shipment back home were being replaced by simulated images of American POWs in the savage hands of Asian Communists.

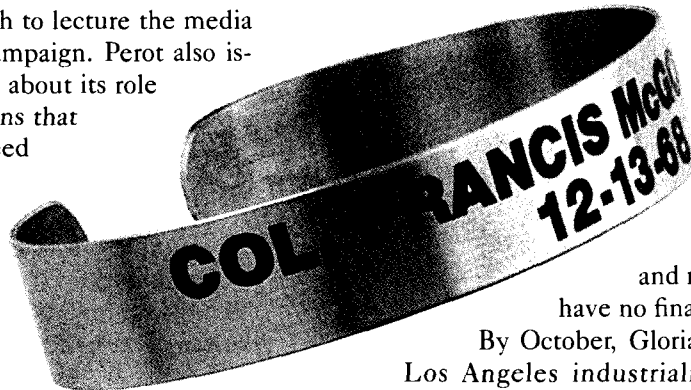
Enter VIVA and the Bracelets

AMID THESE EVENTS ANOTHER ORGANIZATION WAS launching an enterprise that would make the POW/MIA issue the subject of intense passion among millions of Americans for decades. This was the Victory in Vietnam Association, or VIVA.

Back in the spring of 1966 Russell Kirk, in the *National Review*, had ballyhooed VIVA as a courageous new student-faculty group dedicated to counteracting the rising tide of anti-war feeling on American campuses. Kirk applauded VIVA members for counterdemonstrating against the "peaceniks" at the Oakland naval terminal in No-

vember of 1965 and at UCLA, where the group originated. He also lamented their "penniless" condition, displayed their address prominently, and noted that "as yet they have no financial angels."

By October, Gloria Coppin, wife of the Los Angeles industrialist Douglas Coppin, whose Hydro-Mill Company made airplane parts for major military contractors, was providing a headquarters for the organization and contacts with wealthy and influential members of southern California society. On March 9, 1967, the Victory in Vietnam Association received a state charter from California as an educational and service institution, and less than two months later the IRS granted



it tax-exempt status as a "charitable and educational" organization. VIVA was then able to hold the first of its lucrative annual Salute to the Armed Forces balls, organized by its Ladies Auxiliary (made up of wives of wealthy business, military, and political leaders), and the guests—including Barry Goldwater, Alexander Haig, H. Ross Perot, Bob Hope, Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty, and California Governor Ronald Reagan—were able to receive tax deductions for their contributions. With brimming coffers, VIVA expanded rapidly and planned ever more ambitious campaigns to thwart the anti-war movement.

But by the time of the November, 1968, elections, "peace," not "victory," had become the catchword, as the nation bet on Nixon's secret peace plan. So in 1969 VIVA ceased to be the Victory in Vietnam Association and became Voices in Vital America.

A few months later members of VIVA and Robert Dornan—today a Republican representative from California and a leading proselytizer about live POWs, then a right-wing Los Angeles TV talk-show host and a friend of Gloria Coppin's—contrived the idea of selling bracelets engraved with the names of POWs and MIAs to promote and fund the POW/MIA campaign. In addition to Gloria Coppin, who chaired VIVA's board of directors from its founding until 1974, one of the prime movers in VIVA's bracelet manufacturing was Carol Bates, who was to take over the directorship of the National League of Families in 1976 and to become a coordinator of the POW/MIA is-

sue for the Defense Intelligence Agency, a position she has held since 1984. Bracelets were produced just in time for the May 9, 1970, Salute to the Armed Forces ball, where Governor Reagan was the keynote speaker, Bob Hope and Martha Raye were made co-chairs of the bracelet campaign, H. Ross Perot was named Man of the Year, and Mrs. Perot accepted the first bracelet.

Later that month VIVA sold 1,200 bracelets at the National League of Families convention in Washington and ordered 5,000 more. The bracelet idea quickly mushroomed into a propaganda coup and financial bonanza for the POW/MIA campaign and especially for VIVA, which was soon wholesaling bracelets to the National League, Perot's United We Stand, and junior chambers of commerce across the country. Bracelets were prominently worn by such luminaries as Richard Nixon, General William Westmoreland, Billy Graham, George Wallace, Charlton Heston, Bill Cosby, Pat Boone, Cher and Sonny Bono, Fred Astaire, Johnny Cash, Steve Allen, Princess Grace of Monaco, and, of course, Bob Hope, who personally distributed more than a thousand.

By the time of the January, 1973, Paris Peace Agreement, from four million to ten million Americans were wearing POW/MIA bracelets. The influence on the national imagination cannot be calculated. Every person who wore a bracelet vowed not to remove it until his or her POW/MIA was either found to be dead or returned home. Millions of people thus developed profound emotional bonds with the men whose names were displayed all day on their wrists. Countless American schoolchildren went through some of their most formative years linked to these amulets. How could they not believe in the living existence of their POW/MIAs then—and perhaps today? And the bracelets themselves must still be potent amulets, because even now the National League of Families' official distributors and other organizations are reportedly selling hundreds daily.

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This poor old spread, its waterholes turned dust,

Its paying herd stampeded, lies here slain.

On Reno's rock-shanked hills frustrated rain

Refuses to descend. Spangles of rust

Bestride the bar where hands no longer shake

Quick daiquiris to blur the fear of AIDS,

Net stockings dangle hollow, grand parades

Kick off no more. A hibernating snake

Lies not more still. Beneath the auctioneer's

Gavel fall crates of condoms, lingerie,

The sign from the mirrored orgy chamber: FIRE
EXIT, the kindly tank of oxygen

Whose sweet breath could that reveler inspire

To flare, who might have smoldered in dismay.

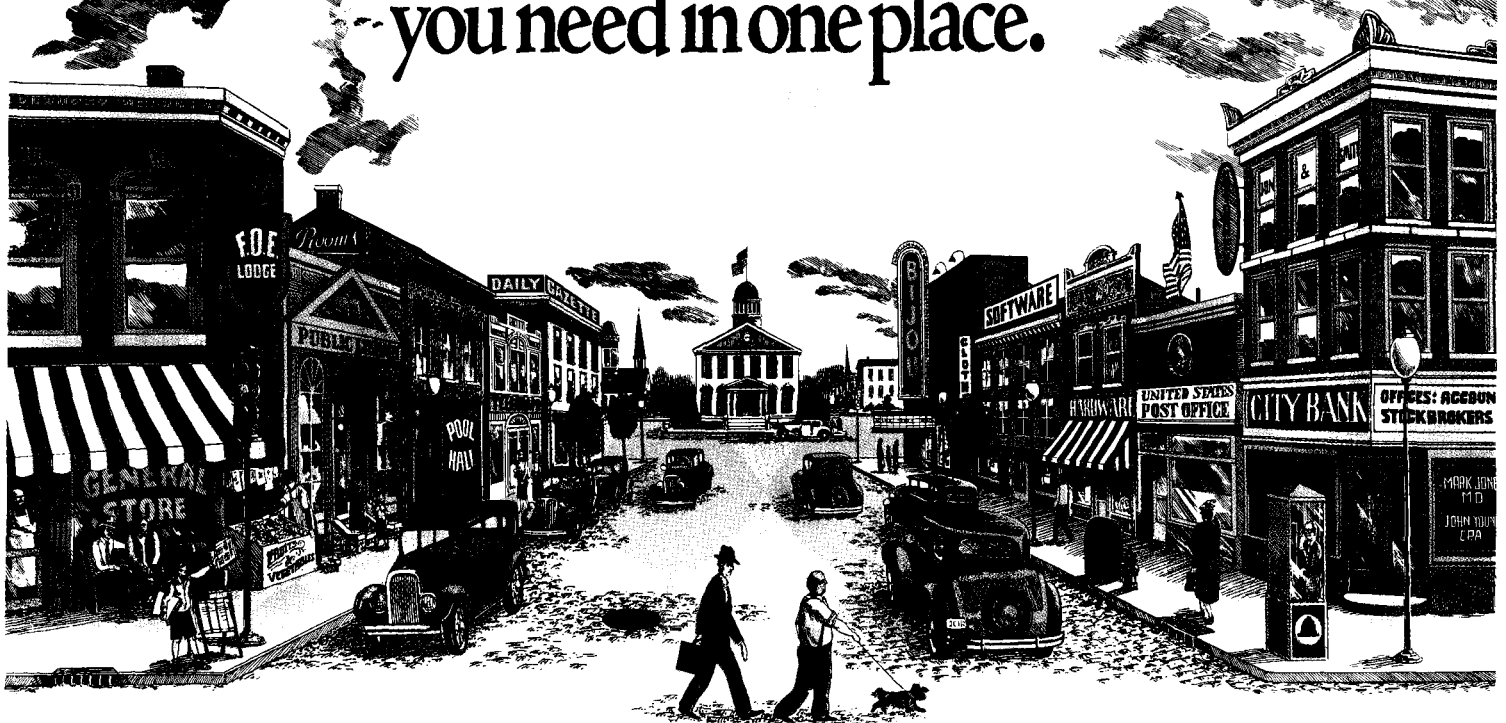
—X. J. Kennedy

The POWs in War and Peace

THE POW/MIA ISSUE SERVED TWO CRUCIAL FUNCTIONS in allowing Richard Nixon to continue the war for four years—and thus avoid the "loss" of Vietnam—even though he had assumed office almost a year after the nation had shown its desperate desire for peace. It was both a booby trap for the anti-war movement and a wrench to be thrown into the works of the Paris peace talks.

The Nixon Administration's four-year campaign to secure the release of American prisoners of war separate from U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam was doomed, along with its other war goals, by the peace accords signed in Paris on January 27, 1973. The agreement among the four parties—the United States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam—

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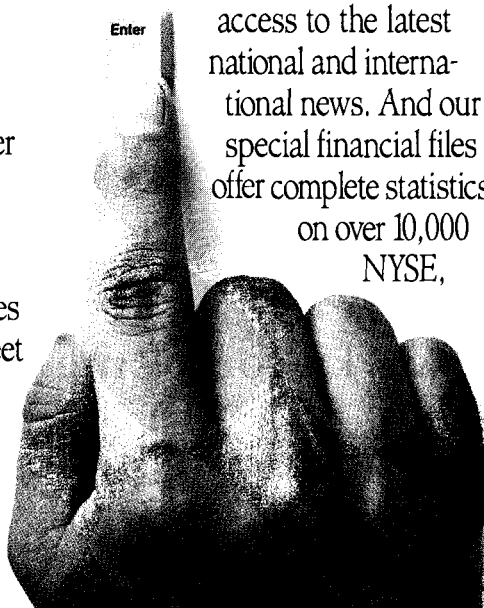


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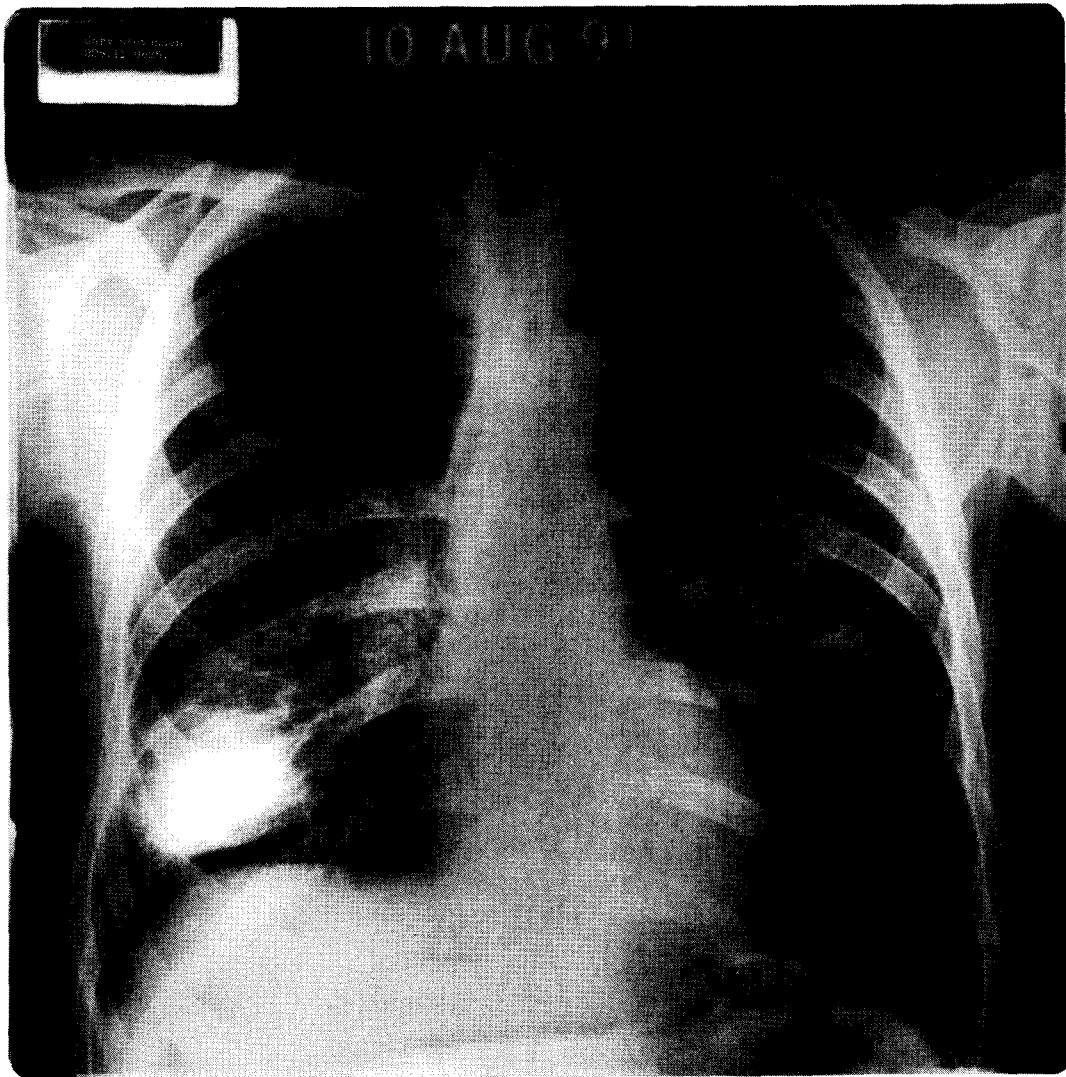


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called for the withdrawal from Vietnam of all "United States forces and those of the other foreign countries allied with the United States" within sixty days and the return of all prisoners of war to be "carried out simultaneously with and completed not later than the same day" as the U.S. troop withdrawal.

In conformity with the agreement, North Vietnam had already delivered to the United States and certified as complete a list of its prisoners of war and those who had died in captivity. Within the stipulated two months the living prisoners on the list, including all those who had been captured in Laos and South Vietnam, were repatriated. Their return was staged as Operation Homecoming, an event transformed by an awesome media blitz into a public-relations coup for President Nixon, who boasted at his formal White House dinner party for the ex-POWs that he had achieved "the return of all of our prisoners of war" as part of his successful conclusion of the war in Vietnam.

But the President's claims by no means satisfied many of those who had been agitating about the POW/MIA issue. They argued that there were "discrepancies" between the Vietnamese lists and American information. Some claimed that there were as many as fifty-six men "known" to have been captured for whom there was now no accounting. The myth of the forsaken POWs enslaved by the Asian Communists was about to emerge from the war to poison the peace.

The Pentagon's New Math

WAS THERE ANY BASIS FOR THE CLAIM THAT the DRV, the PRG, the Pathet Lao, and the Khmer Rouge were secretly keeping Americans as prisoners? As soon as the Paris agreements were signed, the Department of Defense started trying to make the American people think so. While the Administration was basking in glory for bringing home all the POWs, the Pentagon was issuing a series of conflicting statements evidently designed to create both suspicion and confusion. Readers of these statements—especially the families of the missing—could hardly avoid thinking that some men might be held captive someplace in Indochina. For in drafting its announcements the Defense Department was using ink as an octopus does, clouding the waters so as to obscure its own activity.

Here, for example, is what readers of *The New York Times* were encountering from day to day in early 1973:

"The [Defense] department presently lists 587 prisoners—473 in North Vietnam, 108 in South Vietnam and six in Laos—plus 1,335 more men missing in action. In addition, the State Department . . . believes that 51 American civilians have been captured in Indochina, principally in South Vietnam" (January 26).

"The list that the North Vietnamese turned over to American officials in Paris today named 27 American ci-

vilians as prisoners of the Vietcong, and listed seven other Americans as having died in captivity" (January 28).

"The Defense Department lists 1,334 men missing in action—519 in North Vietnam, 504 in South Vietnam and 311 in Laos" (January 29).

"Fifty-six Americans known to have been prisoners of war in Southeast Asia remain unaccounted for by North Vietnam, a Pentagon spokesman said today. . . . There were no clues to the whereabouts of 1,269 men now listed by the Pentagon as missing in Southeast Asia" (January 30).

"Fifty-four men . . . thought by American officials to be prisoners did not appear on the list of 562

confirmed P.O.W.'s held captive in North and South Vietnam and Laos. Nor were they listed as having died in captivity" (February 26).

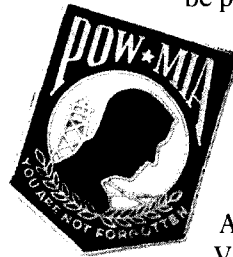
Not having access to the mathematics of the Pentagon's computers, American citizens—not to mention the Vietnamese—would have to resort to

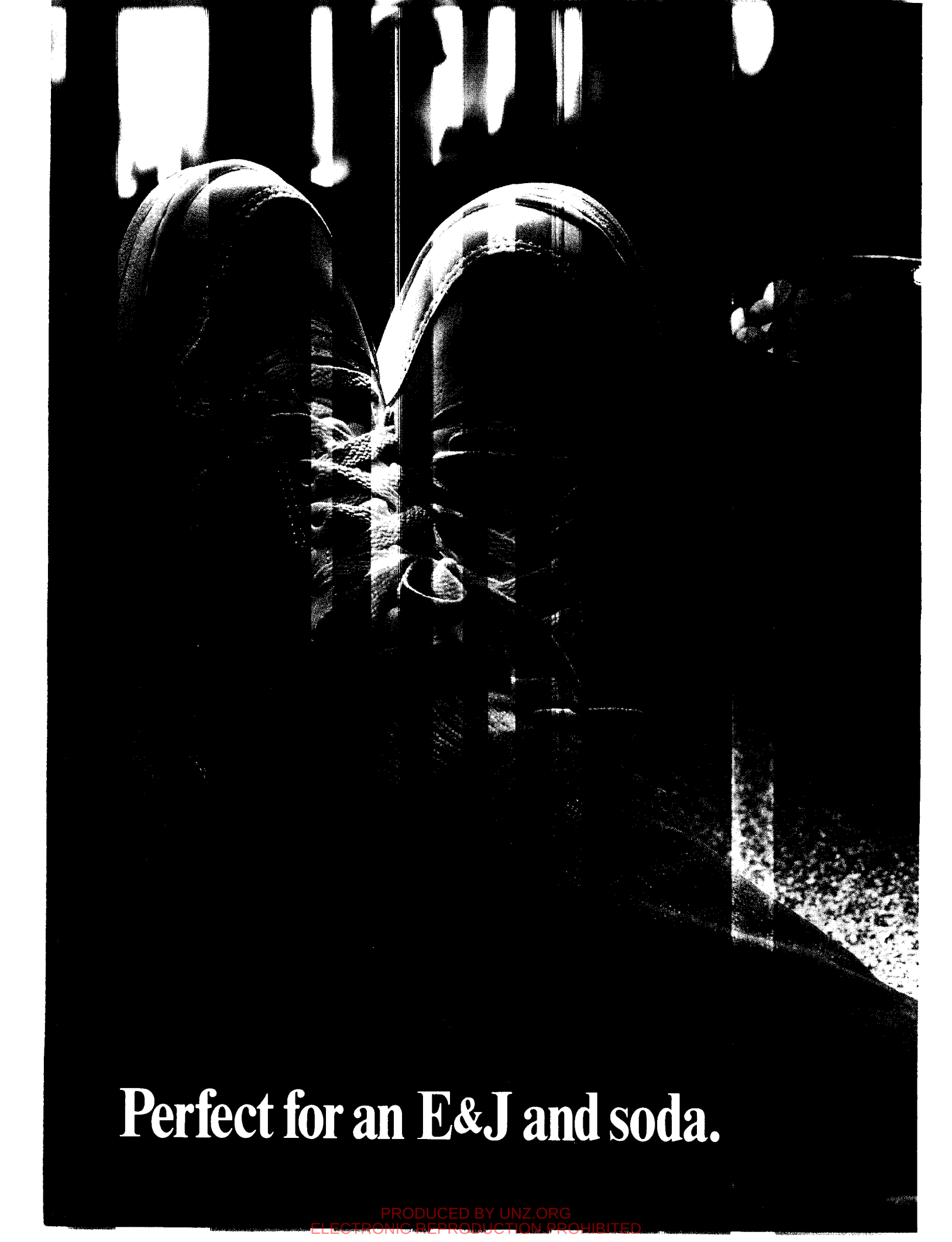
simple arithmetic to try to understand what was being revealed, or obfuscated, by these shifting numbers.

Let us begin with the Defense and State departments' original figures, while bearing in mind that the Nixon Administration had been trying for more than three years to establish as high a total as possible of Americans believed to be prisoners. The Pentagon listed 587 servicemen it considered likely to be prisoners—473 in North Vietnam, 108 in South Vietnam, and six in Laos. Add to that the fifty-one American civilians that the State Department thought were captured throughout Indochina. The total is 638. How many did Vietnam and the Pathet Lao release or otherwise account for as having died in captivity? Here is the total:

Military prisoners from Vietnam released	555
Military prisoners from Laos released	7
Civilian prisoners from Vietnam released	27
Civilian prisoners from Laos released	2
Military prisoners died in captivity	55
Civilian prisoners died in captivity	7
<i>Total prisoners released or died</i>	<i>653</i>

So Vietnam and the Pathet Lao actually released or accounted for fifteen more prisoners than the Defense and State departments had listed as likely prisoners, even though both agencies, as revealed by their own documents, had attempted to inflate their figures. (Note also that the State Department's figure included civilians believed to have been captured in Cambodia.) The figures for Laos, due for a key role in the POW/MIA myth, were especially embarrassing for the Pentagon, which had listed six men thought to be prisoners there. Seven military prisoners were returned from Laos, and two of the supposed six Laotian military prisoners were actually in the hands of the Vietnamese; instead of the six on the Pentagon's list of Laotian POWs, it got back nine.





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The Case of the Disappearing POWs

THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON AMERICANS Missing in Southeast Asia, although it carefully reviewed the individual files of 200 other unresolved MIA cases, scrutinized most intensely the cases of unaccounted-for men actually listed by the various services as POWs. How many of these were there? It turns out that the number of cases classified as POWs was not fifty-six, fifty-four, or even fifty-three but thirty-six. Thirty-six was the number presented by the Defense Department. Thirty-six was the number accepted not only by the select committee but also by the chairman of the board of the National League of Families (which by this time was controlled by activists committed to the POW/MIA issue).

The committee conducted an exhaustive study of each of the thirty-six cases. This included a thorough analysis of the complete classified case file maintained by each man's own service, followed by an intensive cross-check with the classified intelligence file maintained by the Defense Intelligence Agency. For fifteen, the committee could find no evidence that the men had been taken alive. Eight of the rest could "possibly" have been captured alive, and eleven, twelve, or thirteen had been at one time "definitely" alive in enemy hands. Of crucial importance were the committee's findings about those eleven, twelve, or thirteen who were known to have been captured:

In six cases, reports from indigenous sources indicate that the individual died in captivity. Another one was reported in 1973, both by the PRG and by returnees, as having died in captivity in 1967, but for technical reasons his case has not been reviewed. Still another defected to the Viet Cong in 1967, and he could still be alive in Vietnam. There is no evidence in the remaining four cases to suggest whether the individual is now dead or alive, but in no case did any of these four appear in a regular POW camp, and all have been missing for at least 6 years.

This handful of cases is the foundation on which the colossal structure of the POW/MIA myth has been built.

So there were not fifty-six or fifty-four or fifty-three unaccounted-for POWs. There were not even thirty-six or twenty-seven or twenty. At the most there were thirteen or twelve or eleven. Except for the defector, all but four of these had evidently died in captivity. None of the four had ever appeared in a regular POW camp, and there is no evidence that any survived later than 1970.

Crucifixion and Resurrection

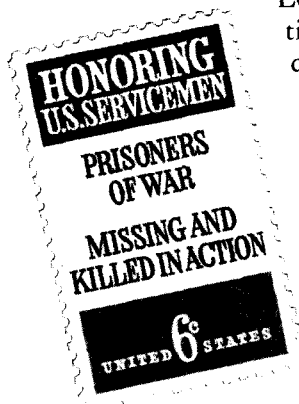
IN THE LATE 1970S PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER BEGAN to reverse course not just on possible relations with Vietnam but also on détente in general, which led, in the final two years of his Administration, to the restoration of draft registration, the removal of SALT II from consideration by the Senate, the embargo of grain sales to the Soviet Union, the boycott of the Olympics in Moscow, and the initiation of the biggest arms buildup in U.S. history.

Simultaneously there began a rewriting and re-imagining of the history of the Vietnam War which would restore the discredited vision of idealistic, courageous Americans heroically battling hordes of sadistic Asian Communists. On the academic front the charge was led by a brigade of revisionist historians who attempted to place the origins of the war and America's conduct of it in a more favorable light. Their task was formidable. Those who fought on the popular-culture front had a much easier job, for they could simply ignore the history and rely entirely on manipulative images. And no image had proved more powerful during the war than that of American prisoners.

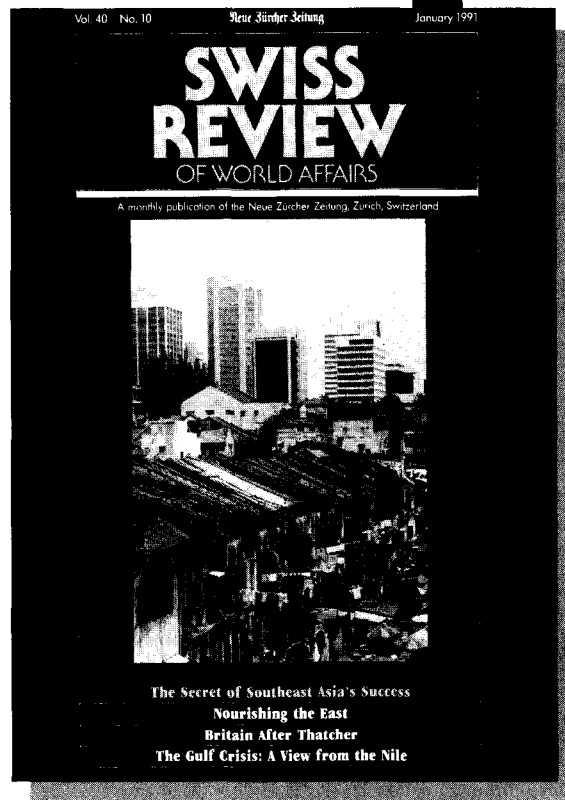
By far the most influential work in this campaign was the movie *The Deer Hunter*, which in 1978 received four Academy Awards, including one for best picture, and was designated the best English-language film of the year by the New York Film Critics' Circle. *The Deer Hunter* succeeded not only in radically re-imagining the war but also in transforming POWs into crucial symbols of American manhood.

The re-imagining appears quite conscious, though most critics at the time seemed oblivious of it. The basic technique was to take images of the war that had become deeply embedded in America's consciousness and transform them into their opposite. For example, in the first scene in Vietnam a uniformed soldier throws a grenade into an underground shelter harboring village women and children, and then with his automatic assault rifle mows down a woman and her baby. Although the scene resembles *Life's* pictures of the My Lai massacre, the soldier is not an American but a North Vietnamese. He is then killed by a lone guerrilla, who is not a Viet Cong but our Special Forces hero, Robert DeNiro.

When two men plummet from a helicopter, the images replicate a telephotographic sequence from the war showing an NLF prisoner being pushed from a helicopter to make other prisoners talk; but the falling men in the movie are American POWs attempting to escape from their murderous NLF captors. The central, structuring metaphor of the film is the Russian roulette that the sadistic Asian Communists force their prisoners to play. POW after POW is shown with a revolver at his right temple, framed to match with precision the sequence seen by tens of millions of Americans in which the chief of the Saigon police placed a revolver to the right temple of an



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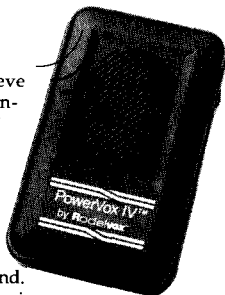
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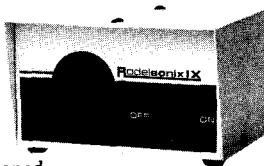
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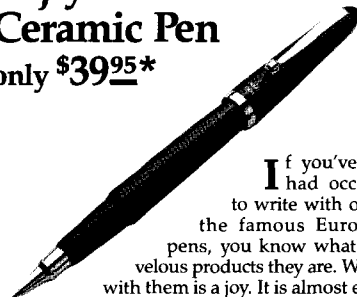
Mice, rats, roaches, bats, fleas and spiders can make your life miserable at home or at work. Old fashioned poisons temporarily get rid of them, but are a hazardous to you, your children and your pets. Our *Rodelsonix IX* uses sound-waves to disrupt the nervous system of bugs and other pests, but is completely non-toxic to humans and pets. There's nothing to prepare, nothing to set up and no mess. Simply plug it in. Pests become disoriented and leave—never to return.

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NLF prisoner and killed him with a single shot; even the blood spurting out of the temple is exactly replicated. There is no evidence that any such atrocity was ever committed against a single American prisoner of the NLF or North Vietnam.

The Deer Hunter's manipulation of images culminates in a long sequence in which DeNiro persuades Christopher Walken that their only hope of escape is to use the Russian-roulette revolver to kill their captors. The fiendish Vietnamese have placed them in a half-submerged tiger cage, behind which we see a single vertical and a single horizontal strand of barbed wire, which somehow frequently replace the bars of the tiger cage in the camera's field of vision. Whatever reason their captors may have had for this arrangement, it allows the camera to show only the heads and torsos of the two men, and the lighting is set up—by the director, not the Communists—so that throughout much of this sequence the heads and torsos are silhouetted in profile. Thus in frame after frame appears the logo, including the single strand of barbed wire, of the POW/MIA flag.

Intercut with this sequence are images of the POWs as crucified Christs, bloody headbands replacing the crown of thorns, with the hands of soldiers hauling them up to their torture and death. The religious and patriotic messages of *The Deer Hunter* are unified from the beginning, when a banner that proclaims SERVING GOD AND COUNTRY PROUDLY hangs over the wedding celebration, to the very end, when, just as at a National League of Families convention, everybody sings "God Bless America." And the unifying images are those of American white working-class men as crucified prisoners of the Vietnamese.

But for the POWs and MIAs to become an authentic myth gripping America's heart, less subtle visions had to be shaped by Hollywood. Who could resurrect those

missing American fighting men who had been crucified by the Asian Communists and their domestic accomplices? This was a job for true heroes, led by one of VIVA's original boosters, Ronald Reagan.

Hollywood Heroes I: Bo Gritz and Ronald Reagan

THE STORY OF THE HEROIC AMERICAN PRISONERS abandoned in Southeast Asia could not become a major American myth until the dream factory geared up its assembly line for mass production of the essential images. But Hollywood was actually involved in creating the historical raw materials that the POW rescue movies were later to fantasize.

The character central to the POW/MIA story as it attained its full mythic status in the 1980s was retired Special Forces Colonel James "Bo" Gritz, who organized raids into Laos to rescue men he already envisioned in images that would later be projected on movie and TV screens around the world. With devout faith in living POWs abandoned by their government to cruel Communist slavery, Gritz conceived of their rescue as a mission forced upon him by destiny. Why was he the chosen one? Because the only two other men capable of such intense "action," as he put it, were no longer around to do the job: "Both Teddy Roosevelt and John Wayne are dead."

But two other men of action were available at least to help finance the mission: Captain Kirk, of the starship *Enterprise*, and Dirty Harry. William Shatner put up \$10,000 and received movie rights to the Gritz story. Clint Eastwood, who contributed \$30,000, was assigned a far more crucial role in the adventure.

Ever since the Paris agreement of 1973 POW activists had been elaborating the theme of a conspiracy high in the government to

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than that of American prisoners.



POWs as depicted in *The Deer Hunter* (1978)



Movie Still Archives

deny the existence of American prisoners. The villains were government bureaucrats, CIA operatives, and liberal politicians, personified by President Carter himself. With the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in early 1981, the myth evolved with a new twist: the good President amid the evil officials. Ronald Reagan's heart yearned to save the POWs, but the President was surrounded and kept in ignorance by that clique of scheming bureaucrats and liberals now known as the doorkeepers or gatekeepers. Who could possibly get by the all-powerful evil gatekeepers and bring the truth to the good President?

The one man in America Colonel Gritz knew he could rely on for the job was Clint Eastwood. His plan hinged on two tête-à-têtes between Eastwood and the President. On the night of November 27, 1982, after receiving word that Gritz's team had crossed the Mekong River from Thailand into Laos, Eastwood was to fly from his California ranch to a prearranged meeting at Reagan's California ranch and inform the President about the raid. When the raiders had actually freed American POWs, they were to send a message by means of "nuclear fire plan boxes" ("state-of-the-art . . . Indirect Transmission Devices" furnished by Litton Industries) to their base in Thailand, which would relay the message to their "Angels West" base in Los Angeles, which would in turn relay the message to Eastwood, who would then once again fly to see his old friend Ronald Reagan, who would then have to do what he wanted to do all along: send U.S. forces to rescue the POWs. So crucial was Eastwood's first meeting with the President that Gritz led his men across the Mekong before most of their weapons had arrived, so that they would be in Laos by the night of the

twenty-seventh, California time. Eastwood reportedly carried out his assignment—either flying from his Shasta ranch to Reagan's Santa Barbara ranch to meet with the President at the appointed time or, in a less theatrical version, informing the President about the raid by telephone. When the raiders returned from Laos to Thailand, on December 3, they found this message waiting for them from a team member in California:

CLINT AND I MET WITH PRESIDENT ON 27TH. PRESIDENT SAID: QUOTE, IF YOU BRING OUT ONE U.S. POW, I WILL START WORLD WAR III TO GET THE REST OUT. UNQUOTE.

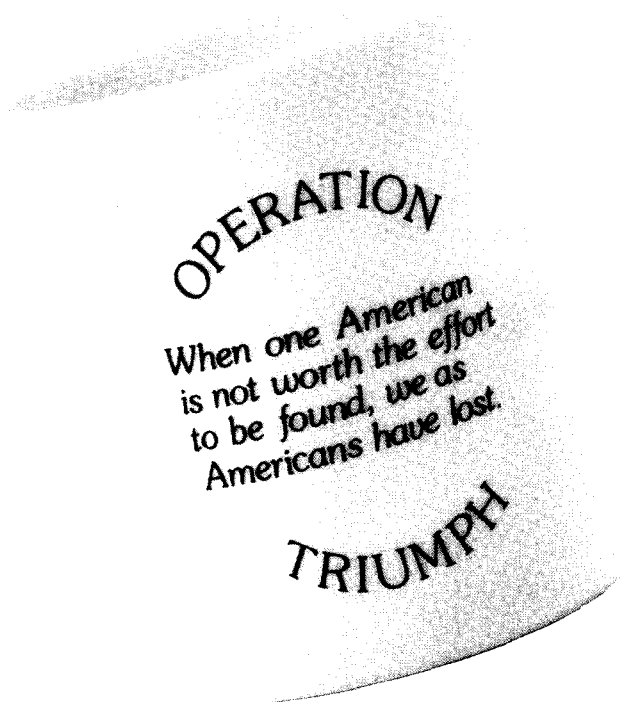
Whether the President indeed said these words we don't know, but they would certainly be in character. After all, Ronald Reagan had been active in POW issues ever since he was himself a POW of Asian Communists during the Korean War—as the star of the 1954 movie *Prisoner of War*.

Gritz's raid, however, was not entirely a Hollywood production. Unlike all those heroes in the subsequent movies inspired by their adventure, the Americans did not ambush and wipe out hordes of Asian Communists. In fact, almost as soon as they arrived in Laos, they were ambushed, routed, and forced to flee back to Thailand—not by treacherous Communists, as they initially assumed, but by a rival anti-Communist Laotian group whom Gritz's men had offended in Thailand and to whom Gritz, ironically enough, reportedly had to pay a ransom of \$17,500 to recover a captured American teammate. The raiders of course encountered no POWs.

In fact, neither this raid nor ones that Gritz claimed to have carried out deeper in Laos in the ensuing months yielded any tangible evidence of American POWs. Thirty rolls of photographs taken with high-tech cameras, which Gritz promised to give to a congressional subcommittee investigating his raids, never materialized. Alleged remains of two American POWs which Gritz brought back with him turned out to be bones from two Asians mixed with animal bones.

Yet Gritz was tremendously effective in achieving one of his principal goals: "We have heightened public awareness of the POW question." His escapades were to be vital to what the Reagan Administration was calling, in the same words used by Gritz, its "public awareness" campaign, initiated just as Gritz was preparing his raiders. As the *Final Interagency Report of the Reagan Administration on the POW/MIA Issue* phrased it, "From its inception in 1982, the public awareness campaign steadily gained momentum."

As it left office, in 1989, the Reagan Administration could truthfully exult that this "aggressive public awareness campaign," waged "in coordination with the National League of POW/MIA Families," had "raised domestic consciousness of this issue to the highest level



since the end of the war" while causing "media coverage" to increase "dramatically." A full "integration of the National League of Families into our efforts" meant that the League became even more thoroughly intertwined with the government than it had been with its creator, the Nixon Administration. The 1990 *POW-MIA Fact Book* states outright,

United States Government policy regarding the POW/MIA issue is coordinated through the POW/MIA Interagency Group (IAG). Membership in the IAG includes the Defense Department, the White House National Security Council (NSC) staff, the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the National League of POW/MIA Families.

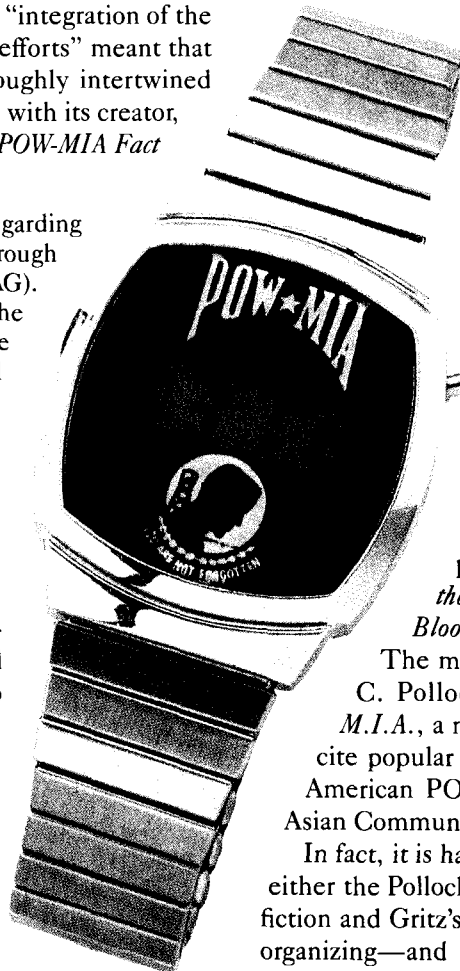
President Reagan vastly expanded the POW/MIA section of the Defense Intelligence Agency, more than tripling its staff and adding "a special team deployed in Southeast Asia" to solicit "refugee information." A key addition to the DIA staff was Carol Bates, who had been a co-founder of VIVA and its bracelet campaign and the executive director of the National League of Families during the period when it was transformed into the leading promoter of the belief in live postwar POWs.

Three days before news of Gritz's first raid burst upon the public, while Gritz was conducting his second raid, President Reagan, who had been kept closely informed, declared to a special meeting of the National League of Families that from now on "the government bureaucracy" would have to understand that the POW/MIA issue had assumed "the highest national priority" (a phrase echoing VIVA's "one of our nation's top priorities").

In the next few months Colonel Gritz became a star of magazines, newspapers, radio, and TV. But he was a fast-fading luminary, for the story of his raids was hardly a tale of spectacularly successful heroism. Hollywood would now have to show how the story was supposed to look.

Hollywood Heroes II: Gene Hackman and Chuck Norris

AMID THE MEDIA HOOPLA ABOUT THE GRITZ RAIDS, the first fantasized movie version began shooting. Starring Gene Hackman as a retired Marine colonel, *Uncommon Valor* made it to the screen in time for the Christmas season of 1983. The following year came *Missing in Action*, with Chuck Norris as retired



Special Forces Colonel James Braddock, an even more thinly disguised impersonation of retired Special Forces Colonel Bo Gritz. And in 1985 the POW/MIA myth attained its apotheosis in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, with Sylvester Stallone now incarnate as the true American superhero of our epoch.

The ideological agenda of *Uncommon Valor* is suggested by the identity of its co-producers: John Milius, whose vision is expressed most clearly in two films he directed during this period, *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Red Dawn* (1984), and Buzz Feitshans, Milius's frequent collaborator, whose other productions include *First Blood*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Red Dawn*, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Rambo III*, and *Total Recall*.

The movie also appears to draw heavily on J. C. Pollock's best-selling 1982 novel *Mission M.I.A.*, a militarist tract explicitly designed to incite popular demand for mercenary raids to rescue American POWs and to slaughter their subhuman Asian Communist captors.

In fact, it is hard to disentangle *Uncommon Valor* from either the Pollock novel or the actual raids, for Pollock's fiction and Gritz's adventures are intertwined. Gritz was organizing—and publicizing—his raids in 1981, while Pollock was writing *Mission M.I.A.*, and an extended excerpt from the novel appeared in the same issue of *Penthouse* (March, 1982) that printed a long interview with Gritz about his plans. So evidently Gritz and Pollock gave ideas to each other as well as to *Uncommon Valor*.

The film was labeled a mere "Okay grind actioner" by *Variety* and dismissed at first by most reviewers, whose reactions can be summed up by this headline: "COMIC-STRIP-LEVEL HEROISM MAKES UNCOMMON VALOR A COMMON BORE." But within a few weeks critics were trying to comprehend the startling audience response to what was turning out to be the "biggest movie surprise" of the 1983–1984 season. The best explanation seemed to come from "an ordinary moviegoer who said with satisfaction of the bloody ending in which dozens of the enemy are mowed down by the Americans, 'We get to win the Vietnam War.'"

Uncommon Valor's formula for such a revision of history was identified by the cultural critic Rob Edelman in terms that would soon also apply to its spectacular successors:

The Vietnam war is not really over. . . and we—America—can still pass for a touchdown at Ho Chi Minh Stadium and eke out a last second victory in the Rice Paddy Bowl. Just send a few good boys back there, kick some Asian ass, liberate a few MIAs. The Laotians—or

Cambodians, or Vietnamese, for they are really all alike—will fall like Indians in a John Wayne movie, and America will be proud and regain its honor.

This message would become explicit later in 1984, as full-page shoot-'em-up ads for *Missing in Action* proclaimed: "THE WAR'S NOT OVER UNTIL THE LAST MAN COMES HOME!"

Yet the revised history offered by *Uncommon Valor* was not quite as "mindless" as many critics labeled it, for they were ignoring a subtext based on the POW/MIA pseudohistory already widely diffused throughout sections of American society and accepted by many viewers as a true, even the essential, version of the Vietnam War.

The experience of Colonel Jason Rhodes (Hackman), whose son had been missing in action for a decade since

the end of the war, helped to transform details of this pseudohistory into mythology that became part of the shared cultural inheritance of 1980s America. Like Colonel Gritz, Colonel Rhodes learned that there had been "over four hundred live sightings of men held against their will" and "there are compounds all over northern Laos." Why Laos? The case for live POWs in Vietnam was so untenable that true believers had been forced to shift the burden of their argument onto Laos. Colonel Gritz had testified to Congress, "Nearly 700 airmen were shot down over Laos during the Vietnam War. Not one has been returned." In fact, as previously discussed, more prisoners were returned from Laos than the Defense and State departments had listed as probable prisoners there; subsequent investigation demonstrated that no more than five others had ever been captive in Laos,

THE POW/MIA LOBBY

THE FEDERAL government is primarily responsible for the notion that U.S. prisoners of war languish in Indochina. However, several nonprofit organizations concern themselves with the issue, and their activities bolster its significance in the public mind. POW/MIA organizations have varying goals: some claim to have evidence of the whereabouts of prisoners and to be planning rescue missions; others, more modestly, seek to influence government policy. But each of the major groups has in its charter the goal of educating the public about the POW/MIA issue and raising its level of concern, mostly through direct-mail solicitations. The direct mail and speeches and videos that raise public concern thus also raise funds; the funds pay for more mail, which raises funds, which pay for mail.

Capsule descriptions of four of the major groups dealing with the POW/MIA issue appear below. Commenting on the first three of these groups in a 1987 report to Representative Stephen J. Solarz, the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Brigadier General James W. Shufelt, of the Defense Intelligence Agency, wrote, "In closing, it is noteworthy that for all their 'proof' and the untold millions of dol-

lars raised, none of these groups or individuals have yet to furnish even the slightest shred of evidence of PWs, much less secure the return of a living American captive."

American Defense Foundation and the *American Defense Institute*: Incorporated in 1983 by a retired Navy captain and former prisoner of war, Eugene B. "Red" McDaniel, the American Defense Foundation and its educational arm, the American Defense Institute, have been responsible for providing several of the photographs of alleged prisoners that have circulated in recent years. McDaniel's was the group that last summer publicized the now-familiar photograph of three "American prisoners" holding up a sign—a photograph that is widely regarded to be fake. In one fundraising letter McDaniel writes, "I promise to tell all of our hostages, when they are finally freed, of the vital role you played in their release. I wish you would write a brief note on the enclosed donation card, which I will personally hand to the first man to regain his freedom." McDaniel's groups have interests wider than the POW/MIA issue. On the back of McDaniel's memoir of his life as a prisoner, *Scars & Stripes*, the American Defense Foundation is described as a nonprofit foundation that "promotes American moral and military strength as essential elements of world peace." The American Defense Institute supports continued

government funding of the Strategic Defense Initiative and the B-2 Stealth bomber. In 1989 the ADI received \$2.3 million in contributions. In that same year it spent \$523,769 on publications, research, and public affairs, \$223,369 on its speakers' bureau, \$217,625 on internships for young people, \$159,135 on seminars and videos, \$325,648 on a drive to register members of the military and their eligible dependents to vote, \$197,710 on POW awareness, and \$422,753 on fund-raising.

Account For POW/MIA (also known as the *Skyhook II Project*): Incorporated in 1984 by John LeBoutillier, a one-term Republican congressman from Long Island, Account for POW/MIA describes its mission as "To secure humane treatment of, status information, and accountability and to promulgate concern for American Prisoners of War and Missing in Action in Southeast Asia in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 1949." Its appeals feature references to specific numbers of prisoners known to be held, detailed descriptions of the conditions under which prisoners live, and outlines of how prisoners might be rescued if the organization could raise the necessary money. "We are close to making contact with an American POW who has been alone since his fellow prisoner died of natural causes less than a year ago," one LeBoutillier letter reads. "That effort could fail for a lack of funds.

and all these had almost certainly died in the mid- or late 1960s. Yet by the time *Uncommon Valor* was screened, millions of Americans believed the Gritz version.

In a scene charged with a shock of recognition for viewers familiar with the widely accepted pseudohistory, Colonel Rhodes becomes convinced that his son is a prisoner in one of the Laotian camps. After ten years of being brushed off by government bureaucrats and victimized by con men in Thailand, Rhodes finally learns the truth from an active-duty Air Force colonel. Noting with a sigh, "I suppose someone could call this treason," the officer pulls from his briefcase a photograph taken from an SR-71 Blackbird high-altitude reconnaissance plane. "There's your proof," he declares. "It's a prison camp in Laos." Whatever the photograph's effect on most of the movie's reviewers, countless members of the audience

were reminded of the famous "Fort Apache" photograph that inspired Colonel Gritz's raids, and were thrilled that the film anticipated their recognition.

The scene enshrines the Fort Apache photograph while wiping away its tarnished history. Word of such a photograph or photographs, taken either from an SR-71 flying at 80,000 feet and 2,000 miles per hour or from a spy satellite, began leaking out soon after Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency, in January of 1981. This was the interpretation of the photo: thirty men, who were in some kind of formation, cast shadows longer than Asians would; they seemed "posed in a secret body-language code taught to selected airmen facing a risk of capture"; tools were evident that were too big for Asians; one structure might be a guard tower; on one side of the camp there appeared to be a 5

Please be as generous as you can as soon as you can." LeBoutillier typically attributes his claims to reports from refugees, "secret information," or "sources," or gives no attribution.

In 1989 Account For POW/MIA raised \$343,862 from direct mail and received \$98,626 in unsolicited contributions. Of that money, \$276,832 went for postage and mailing costs and \$71,500 went to unspecified "program field expenses." It is difficult to determine how much of its money Account For POW/MIA spent on its aim of disseminating information and how much on fund-raising. The organization's financial statement makes the link between the two explicit: the expenses column includes the category "public information combined with fund raising."

Operation Rescue: Incorporated by a former fighter pilot, Jack Bailey, in 1981, Operation Rescue has produced photographs allegedly of missing servicemen, turned in bone fragments that it claimed were those of missing servicemen, and, both for humanitarian reasons and in the hope of getting information about POWs, sought to rescue Southeast Asian refugees from boats off the coast of Vietnam. One 1986 fund-raising letter reads, "Must raise \$13,671.71 by Friday, October 31, or vital intelligence gathering missions may have to be stopped. Unless these missions continue, there is no hope for the return of POWs and MIAs captive in Vietnam.

Again, if I cannot raise \$13,671.71 by October 31, vital intelligence gathering cannot continue. And an American serviceman will die in the jungles of Vietnam." In 1989 Operation Rescue raised \$228,005 in contributions. Of that money, \$29,026 went to collecting intelligence on missing servicemen and aiding Southeast Asian refugees, \$25,279 went to management expenses, and \$163,298 went to fund-raising. From 1981 to 1989 Operation Rescue raised \$3.3 million dollars. At no point from 1985 to 1989 did the amount of money that Operation Rescue spent on direct services rise above 16.6 percent of its total expenditures. The floor set by the Council of Better Business Bureaus for the portion of contributed money that a charitable group should spend on direct services is 50 percent.

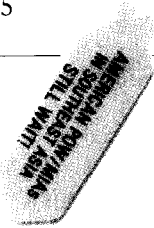
National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia: A copy of Brigadier General Shufelt's report is included in the information routinely provided to the public by the National League of Families. Incorporated in 1970, the League is the oldest and most respected POW/MIA organization. Membership is restricted to relatives of unaccounted-for servicemen. The league's executive director, Ann Mills Griffiths, is the only nongovernment representative on an interagency government panel that crafts policy positions on the POW/MIA issue. Griffiths travels with official delegations to South-

east Asia on missions concerning POW/MIAs. The league endorses the U.S.

government's official position on POW/MIAs and, as its dissemination of the Shufelt report shows, is highly critical of the groups listed above.

If you call the National League's Washington, D.C., telephone number and request information, this is what you'll receive in the mail: statistics from the Defense Intelligence Agency on live-sighting reports and the number of servicemen unaccounted for, status reports on the POW/MIA issue and on the league's activities, answers to frequently asked questions about the league and the POW/MIA issue, and, on different-colored paper, a request for support. Among the suggested things you can do to support the league: participate in the adopt-a-missing-man program, at a cost of \$5.00 a month; wear a POW/MIA pin, available for \$3.00 each or two for \$5.00; display a logo decal, available for \$10.00 per hundred; fly the league flag, available for \$35.00. In 1989 the National League brought in contributions of \$932,344 and spent \$193,884 for fund-raising and \$843,188 on its programs. Among the program costs were \$150,732 for printing and postage, \$228,505 for public awareness, and \$198,266 for salaries and employee benefits for the league's six employees.

—Ethan Seidman



and on the other side a 2, no doubt meant as either a call for help or a signal from the prisoners or both, referring to the number of men held in the camp or to the crew of a B-52 or to the number of hostages being held in Iran. The ostensible chronology of subsequent events is central to the POW/MIA myth.

Colonel Gritz, with considerable assistance from the Pentagon, immediately began training a team to rescue the prisoners from Fort Apache, a mission he dubbed Operation Velvet Hammer. But, according to his account,

In mid-March 1981, at almost the precise moment that the 'VELVET HAMMER' team was preparing for overseas movement, I was informed that the new Reagan Administration had become fully persuaded of the existence of American POWs in Southeast Asia and had decided on an official rescue mission. . . . I was asked, therefore, to abandon the VELVET HAMMER Operation.

The official raid was to be carried out by Delta Force commandos. "In May 1981, the official rescue mission—the DELTA OPERATION—was also cancelled," Gritz testified. To him and to later true believers this was proof of government cowardice and betrayal.

One would never guess from the POW/MIA movies and writings and folklore that the U.S. government did in fact stage a raid into Laos, a raid that penetrated to the site of the alleged Fort Apache, only to discover that it was not a POW camp after all. This mission, by Laotian mercenaries trained, equipped, and paid by the CIA, was carried out in May of 1981; the failure of its on-site photographs to disclose any trace whatsoever of POWs was evidently the real reason that the Delta Force raid was called off. That raid, involving more than a hundred helicopters and transport planes, had been primed to go.

Nevertheless, government cowardice and betrayal could now be built into the mythological structure

of *Uncommon Valor*

and its successors. Hackman's efforts to recruit and train a team to rescue his son, which take up more than half the film, are constantly menaced by "the politicians" and omnipresent government

agents equipped with high-tech spy mikes and phone taps. These sinister figures also try to intimidate the Texas oil tycoon who finances the raiders' training camp (he, too, has an MIA son)—by threatening an IRS audit of his corporation. Just as Hack-

man and his team are about to launch their mission from Thailand into Laos, U.S. agents have them apprehended by Thai authorities, who confiscate their weapons, forcing them to rely on a Bangkok gun dealer and an aged Laotian drug runner.

To recruit his team of rescuers, Hackman first had to rescue each man from the corrupting and emasculating bonds of civilian life in America, including the domestic bondage imposed by women. Only then could these all-American heroes slaughter hordes of puny little Asians, rescue their enslaved comrades, give the Vietnam War a noble ending, and redeem America.

The image of a nation run by "bureaucrats," "politicians," and shadowy secret agents in business suits who revile and betray its true warrior-heroes forms part of the tableau that gives the POW/MIA myth such potency. For the myth rejects and repudiates not only the history of the Vietnam War but also what, according to the myth, is the quintessence of everyday life in post-Vietnam America. The idealism, virility, and heroism of men who dedicate their lives to rescuing their abandoned comrades, sons, and fathers are presented as the alternative to a weak, decadent America subjugated by materialism, hedonism, and feminism.

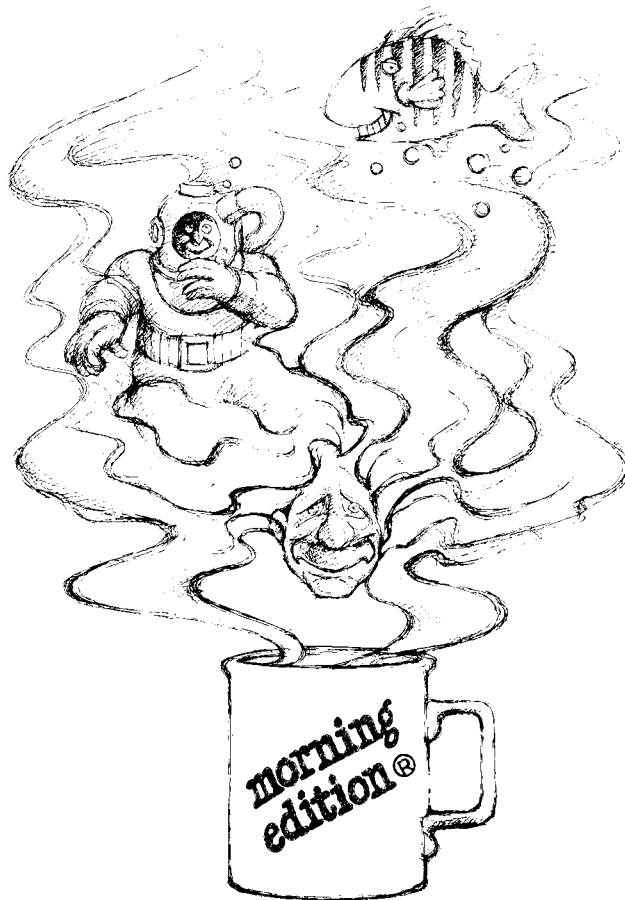
Hollywood Heroes III: Rambo

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POW/MIA STORY into genuine myth was consummated in a fantasy whose hero's name would soon become a term in the political discourse and everyday vocabulary not only of the nation but of the world. Without this movie (or some equally sensational dramatization) the POW/MIA issue could hardly have assumed its mythic role in the lives of tens of millions of Americans, for essential to their personal faith was some powerful visual display of the key elements of the myth.

Six weeks after the opening of *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, President Reagan projected himself into its star role—while symbiotically hyping the film with a presidential plug—as he declared (ostensibly as a microphone test before his national address on the release of U.S. hostages in Beirut): "Boy, I saw *Rambo* last night. Now I know what to do the next time this happens." Later that month members of Congress "signaled a new tough-minded attitude" on foreign relations by invoking the image of Rambo a dozen times in debating a foreign-aid bill. Rambo's political repercussions have continued to be heard around the world. Late last year, for example, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq defiantly responded to the U.S. threat of war with his own bluster in the guise of cultural criticism: "The Americans are still influenced by Rambo movies, but this is not a Rambo movie."

As *Rambo* packed theaters with audiences who howled with pleasure and wildly cheered every slaying of a Vietnamese or Russian by its invulnerable hero, the nation





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was flooded with Rambo “action dolls,” watches, walkie-talkies, water guns, bubble gum, pinball machines, sportswear for all ages, and even “Rambo-Grams,” messages delivered by headbanded musclemen sporting bandoliers across their bare chests. A TV cartoon serial transformed Rambo into “liberty’s champion,” a Superman-like figure engaged in global struggles against evil; designed by Family Home Entertainment “for ages 5-12,” it began its extended run in 1986.

This new American hero was constructed in Hollywood through highly sophisticated manipulation of recycled cultural materials. Rambo’s roots tap into the very foundation of American self-identity: the myth of the frontier. As Richard Slotkin has shown, the frontier’s corollary “myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience.” Rambo perpetuates the wartime vision of Vietnam as “Injun country.” But Rambo is not just the Indian-fighter, recognized as the first national hero of the American state; he is also the Indian. For as the myth of the frontier continued to evolve, its hero metamorphosed from being just the captive or destroyer of Indians into a figure coalescing with the Indian and the wilderness. John Rambo, we are told, is of “Indian-German descent”—“a hell of a combination.” “What you choose to call hell, he calls home.”

But the main models for Rambo come much more directly out of American popular culture, a genesis that helps account for his tremendous impact on audiences. Perhaps once the most popular author in America, Edgar Rice Burroughs created two of Rambo’s forebears: a martial-arts expert and veteran of a defeated American army who fights for good causes in alien lands against seemingly insurmountable odds (John Carter), and a bare-chested, muscular he-man who merges completely with the tropical jungle to carry out spectacular deeds of heroism

Movie Still Archives



A scene from *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985)



*The transformation of the
POW/MIA story into genuine
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but of the world.*

(Tarzan). And Rambo draws much of his psychological power from one of America’s most distinctive cultural products, the comic-book hero who may seem to be an ordinary human being but really possesses superhuman powers that allow him to fight, like Superman, for “truth, justice, and the American way” and to personify national fantasies, like Captain America.

In *Uncommon Valor* and *Missing in Action*, the imprisonment to which American society subjects its Vietnam veterans is mostly domestic and metaphorical. But when we first see Rambo in *First Blood Part II*, he is performing slave labor, breaking rocks in a desolate prison as punishment for his rebellion against the brutal lawmen of *First Blood* (1982); so he suffers the same fate in America that his buddies, abandoned by America, suffer in Vietnam. When his former commanding officer, Green Beret Lieutenant Colonel Trautman, offers him freedom in exchange for undertaking the mission in Vietnam, Rambo makes his famous reply: “Do we get to win this time?” Resonating in the question are years of

rewritten and re-imaged history which have taught the 1985 audience that we could have won the war if only the politicians, the media, the liberal establishment, bureaucrats, draft-dodging college students and their pinko professors, hippies, wimps, bleeding-heart housewives, and Jane Fonda hadn’t tied our boys’ hands and stabbed them in the back.

The real enemy is personified as the archetypal bureaucrat, the perfidious, gutless, but seemingly omnipotent Marshall Murdock. Accused of being “a stinking bureaucrat that’s trying to cover his ass,” Murdock, who explicitly represents “Washington,” replies, “Not just mine . . . a nation’s.” Trautman advises Rambo, “Let technology do most of the work,” referring to Murdock’s wondrous computer complex and high-tech weaponry. But Murdock uses his machines and underlings to sabo-

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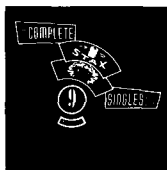
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tage the mission. The climax of *First Blood Part II* comes after Rambo returns with the POWs he has rescued, when he proceeds to blast Murdock's computers with automatic-weapon fire and then uses his gigantic knife to subjugate the whining, quivering, wimpy traitor.

The Plots Thicken

THE CULTURAL PRODUCTS THAT DISSEMINATE the MIA mythology and help to give it potent forms in the popular imagination have tended increasingly to project a vast government cover-up and conspiracy. *Vietnam Journal*, for example, last year ran a three-part series titled "Is the U.S. Hiding the Truth About Missing Soldiers?" (The answer, of course, was yes.) In the 1989 TV movie *The Forgotten*, starring Keith Carradine and Stacy Keach, high government officials actually conspire to psychologically torture and assassinate POWs previously held by Vietnam so that they won't reveal that these officials had colluded with North Vietnam to sabotage a POW rescue mission. The hero of Jack Buchanan's sixteen M.I.A. Hunter novels constantly battles against "Washington" and its sinister operatives; in *M.I.A. Hunter: Cambodian Hellhole* he can pursue his quest only "after demolishing a C.I.A. hit team sent to arrest him."

Meanwhile, however, Rambo was having an influence on the government itself. No postwar White House spokesperson actually claimed that American prisoners were still being held in Vietnam until October of 1985, when *Rambo*, released in May, was still packing the theaters. The assertion that "there have to be live Americans there" was made by none other than Robert C. McFarlane, President Reagan's National Security Adviser, to a forum for business executives and political consultants sponsored by the syndicated columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak.

But just as in the movie, Rambo proved difficult for the government to control once he was unleashed and empowered. Within weeks of the release of the film its messages were being taken too literally by a group of POW/MIA activists that came to be known as the Rambo faction. At the July convention of the National League of Families a speech declaring that the government had "attempted to track down every lead, and respond to every allegation, and we will continue to do so" was interrupted by belligerent chants of "Rambo! Rambo!"

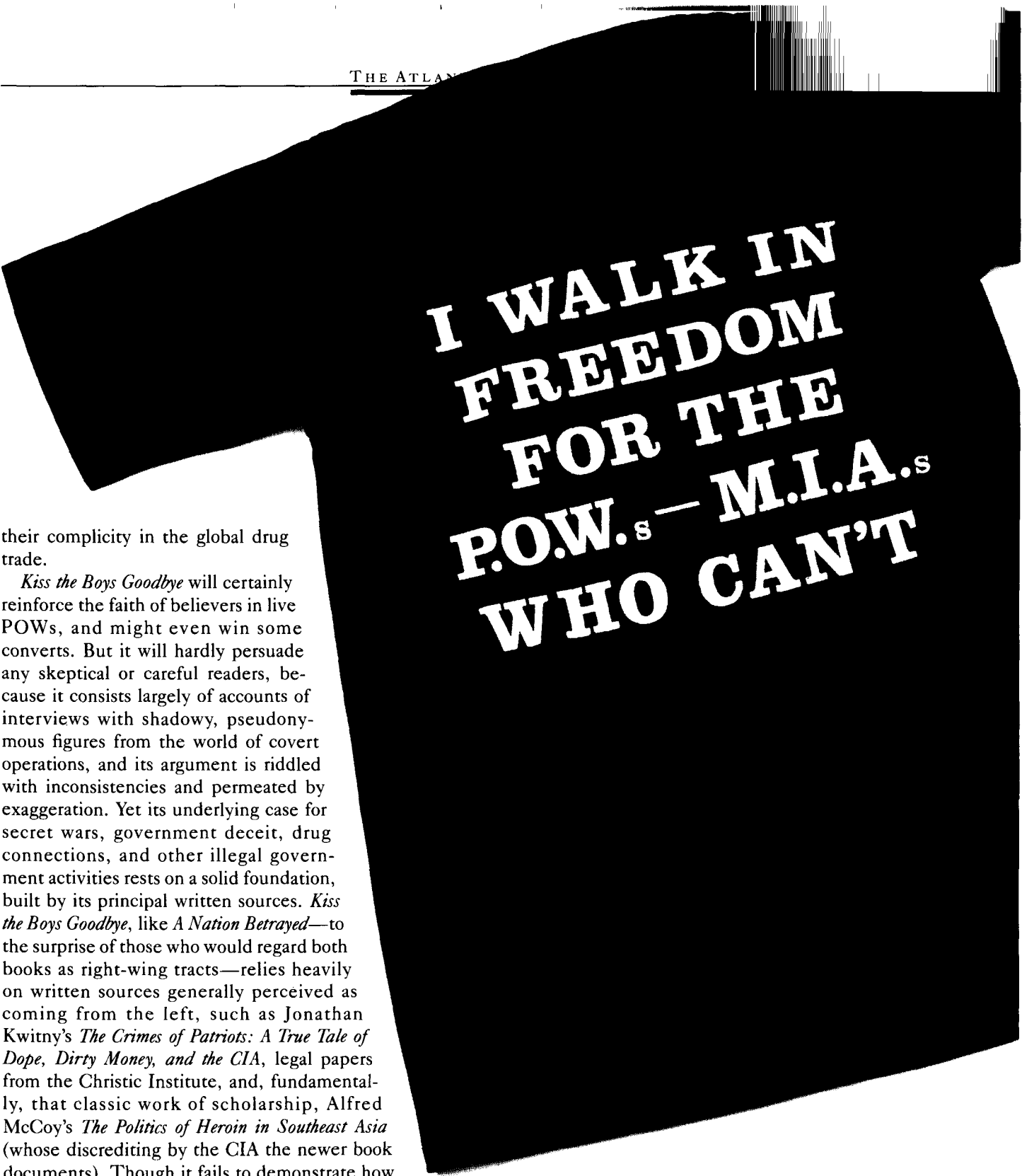
In December, *60 Minutes* aired a segment on the POW issue titled "Dead or Alive." Its producer, Monika Jensen-Stevenson, claimed that the show was designed to present the "two sides" of the issue. One side was the official position of the Reagan Administration: there might be live POWs in Southeast Asia; when and if their existence was proved, the government would use all necessary means to recover them. And what was the other

side? That live POWs were merely a myth that had become a distinctive feature of American culture? No, the other side was the position of the Rambo faction: the government itself was engaged in a vast conspiracy to conceal its own certain knowledge of the existence of dozens if not hundreds of live POWs.

Jensen-Stevenson, soon aided by her husband, William Stevenson, the author of *A Man Called Intrepid* and *Ninety Minutes at Entebbe*, spent the next five years building a case for this enormous conspiracy by the State Department, the Defense Department, the CIA, and other branches of government under the Reagan Administration. But before the couple published *Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed Its Own POWs in Vietnam*, in the fall of last year, an even more radical attack on the government appeared in a volume titled *A Nation Betrayed*, by none other than Colonel Bo Gritz.

In 1987 Gritz made his second trip to a remote region of Burma that forms part of the Golden Triangle, one of the world's major sources of heroin, to interview the drug lord and warlord General Khun Sa about American POWs in Laos. But the interview, which Gritz videotaped, evidently consisted mainly of detailed allegations by Khun Sa about his drug dealings with U.S. government agents, including officials high in the Reagan and Bush Administrations, who were using facilities in Bangkok not to resolve the POW/MIA question but mainly as a cover for their own drug deals and illicit cloak-and-dagger activities. The following year Gritz published *A Nation Betrayed*, an astonishing document whose thesis is that "a parallel government has existed for decades, which led us into a war that cost more than 58,000 lives and infused our nation with drugs," that this "shadow government has used drug and arms trafficking to fund illegal covert operations," and that the agents of this "cancerous bureaucracy," realizing that the discovery of American POWs would lead to the unmasking of their own sinister activities in Indochina, have systematically sabotaged every effort to find and rescue the prisoners.

Kiss the Boys Goodbye considerably elaborates Gritz's argument, incorporating it into a wider thesis: "America's wars in Southeast Asia had not ended with the fall of Saigon," and the "rogue secret wars in Asia," conducted by "a really deep-cover privatized CIA" and other covert agencies, were financed by a "trillion-dollar drug trade." The Stevensons thus explain not only why Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia would continue to hold American POWs but also why officials and agencies of the U.S. government would conspire to conceal the existence of the POWs, even resorting to assassinations of those who knew too much: the Indochinese governments keep prisoners because wars are still being waged on them, and the U.S. officials are afraid that discovery of the POWs will expose the connection between their covert wars and



I WALK IN
FREEDOM
FOR THE
P.O.W.s — M.I.A.s
WHO CAN'T

their complicity in the global drug trade.

Kiss the Boys Goodbye will certainly reinforce the faith of believers in live POWs, and might even win some converts. But it will hardly persuade any skeptical or careful readers, because it consists largely of accounts of interviews with shadowy, pseudonymous figures from the world of covert operations, and its argument is riddled with inconsistencies and permeated by exaggeration. Yet its underlying case for secret wars, government deceit, drug connections, and other illegal government activities rests on a solid foundation, built by its principal written sources. *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*, like *A Nation Betrayed*—to the surprise of those who would regard both books as right-wing tracts—relies heavily on written sources generally perceived as coming from the left, such as Jonathan Kwitny's *The Crimes of Patriots: A True Tale of Dope, Dirty Money, and the CIA*, legal papers from the Christic Institute, and, fundamentally, that classic work of scholarship, Alfred McCoy's *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (whose discrediting by the CIA the newer book documents). Though it fails to demonstrate how the reality of covert, illegal government activities proves the existence of live POWs, *Kiss the Boys Goodbye* does succeed in suggesting why the people engaged in these activities might desperately want to keep unrestrained POW/MIA investigators from mucking around in Southeast Asia. And the main effect of the book may be to introduce people who believe in live prisoners of war to the scholarship demonstrating that the Vietnam War itself was one of those "murky foreign wars" conducted for aims shrouded by U.S. govern-

ment duplicity and waged by "disposable soldiers."

So as the final decade of the twentieth century dawned, the POW/MIA myth, which had already assumed a life of its own, was beginning to resemble a Frankenstein's monster for the forces that had fabricated it out of spare parts from older myths. Whether it can be disposed of, once it has fulfilled the varying purposes that it has been serving since 1969, remains to be seen. □

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SEASON PREVIEW

America's best-loved holiday traditions

FIESTA DE TUMACACORI

Tumacacori, Arizona
December 1

Visitors can watch a traditional Mexican folk or Tohono O'odham Indian dance, listen to a mandolin performance or mariachi music, taste a made-to-order corn tortilla, and browse through a variety of Mexican and Native American arts and crafts displays at this lively fiesta celebrating the cultural heritage of the upper Santa Cruz Valley. Children will especially enjoy the puppet shows and piñatas. The fiesta begins at the old mission church with a morning Mass to commemorate the arrival, in 1691, of Eusebio Francisco Kino, the first missionary priest in the Pimeria Alta. Festivities continue throughout the day and are free. For more information: Tumacacori National Historical Park, Box 67, Tumacacori, AZ 85604; (602) 398-2341.

A CREOLE CHRISTMAS

New Orleans, Louisiana
December 1-31

In the heart of the Big Easy, the romantic and historic French Quarter, the holidays last all month. The myriad festivities include tours of antebellum homes, demonstrations of Creole cooking, a parade that winds through the French Quarter in colorful Mardi Gras fashion, candlelight caroling in Jackson Square, visits by Papa Noël (the Creole Santa), a Hanukkah ceremony, and midnight Mass at St. Louis Cathedral. Visitors can take a riverboat caroling cruise and admire the lights along the Mississippi or travel in a motorcoach to where the levee bonfires are lit on Christmas Eve. Legend has it that the fires help guide Papa Noël on his long



evening's journey. As a finale, the New Year is rung in with an outdoor concert, a street dance, and a fireworks display over the river. Many events are free. For more information: The French Quarter Festival, Box 53362, New Orleans, LA 70153; (800) 673-5725 or (504) 522-5730.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

The John F. Kennedy Center
Washington, DC
December 3-31

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts welcomes guests to its 20th-anniversary celebration. This year the Holiday Celebration, a traditional Washington affair since the center opened, coincides with the capital's bicentennial. Highlights include a *Messiah* sing-along, a performance by the New York String Orchestra, a gospel-music concert, and a New Year's Eve concert followed by ballroom dancing in the Grand Foyer. A variety of free events will be put on by local artists in the center's public areas, and feature films with a holiday theme will be presented throughout the month by the American Film Institute. Ticket prices for

most events range from \$6 to \$36. For more information: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC 20056; (202) 467-4600.

CANDLELIGHT STROLL

Strawbery Banke
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
December 7-8 and 14-15

Step briefly into Christmas past and stroll by candlelight through the streets of a historic New England neighborhood, now a 10-acre complex of 44 buildings authentically restored to represent four centuries of waterfront living. The streets and walkways throughout the grounds will be illuminated by more than 2,000 candles. In each house, named after its residents during the period depicted, familial holiday scenes will be re-created in detail. Carolers and musicians will be performing old favorites, and plenty of hot cider and doughnuts will be served along the way. Tickets cost \$9 for adults and \$5 for children over 10; children under 10 are admitted free. For more information: Strawberry Banke Museum, Box 300, Portsmouth, NH 03802; (603) 433-1100.

A GILDED AGE CHRISTMAS

Hyde Park, New York
December 13-31

On the bluffs overlooking the Hudson River, 90 miles north of New York City, sit examples of the country's most opulent turn-of-the-century mansions. Today some of these estates are national historic sites and open to the public year-round. During the Christmas season, several will be decorated in 19th-century traditional holiday fashion. The Vanderbilt mansion and the Mills mansion at Staatsburg will present "A Gilded Age Christmas." Val-Kill and Springwood, the homes of Eleanor Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt, will re-create a Roosevelt Christmas based on period photographs and oral histories. Entrance fees range from free to \$4. For more information: Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites, Hyde Park, NY 12538; (914) 229-9115.

TORCHLIGHT PARADE

Jackson Hole
Teton Village, Wyoming
December 25 and 31

Jackson Hole, a ski resort in the majestic Teton Mountains, celebrates the holidays with a grand and unusual performance—a torchlight parade on skis. On Christmas night and New Year's Eve, the event begins at the top of Apres Vous Mountain once the sky is completely dark. Some 50 ski-school instructors, carrying torches atop bamboo sticks, ski down the mountain in a serpentine formation. The Torchlight Parade, in its 19th year, can be viewed from the base lodge and is free. For more information: Jackson Hole, Box 290, Teton Village, WY 83025; (800) 443-6931.



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A Short Story



Departures

by Jill McCorkle

ANNA CRAVEN HAS BEEN GOING PLACES ALL ALONE for three years now—to airports, shopping malls, fairs, political rallies, any place where she can be surrounded by people without having to interact with them. She works only two days a week (could retire if she wished), so it's not as if she had other, important things to do. Her children are scattered in every direction, living their own lives, and her time is something that can't easily be filled with cooking or talking on the phone.

"Why don't you watch

TV?" they asked over the holidays, and pointed to the huge console they had given her the year before. "I do," she told them, and did not try to explain that she saw more drama in public places.

"It's not healthy, all this time alone," her son-in-law, the therapist, had said. "There are plenty of other women who are. . ." He faltered for the right words—*widows? all alone?* "Why are you punishing yourself?"

Punishment. The punishment was that Walter was no longer with her—period, the end. Divorcées go out

*Sometimes Anna imagines that
she will turn and see him—that it was
all a misunderstanding*

for drinks and dancing—even the ones her age—but the *widows*, the *all alone*, are supposed to drink coffee and play Mah-Jongg, sing in the church choir, never think about or wish for intercourse other than of a verbal or spiritual sort. Nobody even uses that word—“intercourse”—in front of a widow. Sometimes she wants to tell her son-in-law, the therapist, that *that* is punishment: perfectly good words reduced to nothing. Punishment was that day three years ago when she got the call about Walter’s death. He was on business, the West Coast, his last look fastened on some awful hotel furniture, the telephone cord beyond his reach.

SHE HAD JUST GOTTEN HOME FROM SCHOOL when the call came. The kids at the elementary school called her “the traveling musician,” because she made her rounds to each class once a week. Her music lessons were usually related to the season or the holiday at hand, but she also had her favorites to be sung at any time, such as “Born Free” and “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.” That one was wonderful to hear, a chorus of little high-pitched voices singing words the children did not fully understand, much like “Mares Eat Oats.”

That particular day she had spent the class time singing “Gobble Gobble Turkey” while the students drew their own versions of the first Thanksgiving, with turkeys whose tail feathers were the outline of a hand, each finger colored a different hue. Her mind had been on the upcoming holiday and what kind of sleeping arrangements she would make for her growing family. Her daughter, Carol (wife of the therapist), was pregnant with a second child. Carol had said that Kim, the fifteen-month-old, ate only pizza crust, and that Trey (the therapist, whose name was William Bradford “the Third”) said it was important that they let Kim eat her way through this, that if they used force of any kind, she might never eat vegetables. Anna and Walter had sat up many late nights talking about how absurd these ideas were, how it seemed such a shame that all Kim’s infant toys had been in basic black and white, because *this is what stimulates newborns*. Anna kept wanting to remove the dull toys and replace them with fluffy pastel bears and cats.

Trey had videotaped every minute detail of childbirth. He had carried the placenta home in a lawn and garden bag; though curious, Anna never asked what they did with it. He studied the child’s every movement, was quick to tell anyone who would listen what Kim could and could not see, could and could not know. Walter’s greatest fear had been that they would have a son and name him William Bradford “the Fourth.”

“And then what?” Walter had asked off and on for a month. “Will they call him Quar?” He tossed his travel kit into his suitcase and then stretched out on the bed and laughed. “Or Queer?” He shook his head, hands

clasped behind his neck as he watched her put on her nightgown. They had always done that, locked looks in the mirror as she undressed for bed.

Their oldest son, Ben, had just gotten his divorce and was going to bring a new girlfriend and her four-year-old. The girlfriend had told Anna in their one and only telephone conversation that she had decided to have a child on her own, because she had not yet met the right man. “Little did I know the right man was still married at the time,” she had said, and laughed, Ben chuckling with her in the background. “Divorce is so prevalent, I knew I’d find somebody eventually, you know, somebody who could be a father figure—not, of course, that I think a father figure is important. They aren’t. Men are not always necessary.” *Can you imagine?* Anna had asked after hanging up the phone. *The gall. The poor taste.* Walter had said he would like to put this woman and Trey in a room and lock the door, and take bets on which one would survive the night. Anna said she’d just like to tell them not to come, but Walter talked her out of it; he said it would be one of those occasions they would enjoy after the fact.

AT THE TIME, THEIR YOUNGEST SON, WAYNE, seemed to be the only sane child. He was just out of law school and studying for the bar. Except for an earring in one ear, he was classically clean-cut, with a wardrobe of 100 percent cotton and name brands. The earring, a tiny diamond chip like a star, prompted Walter to say that Wayne had a hole in his head, but it was a joke. They talked a lot about how Wayne had the most sense. How he was the caring child. “A little depressed, maybe,” Walter often said. “But he’ll pull out of it. Got a lot of pressure on him.”

SHE HAD BEEN THINKING ABOUT THE CHILDREN coming home when the phone rang. She had been standing in the kitchen, one crayoned turkey folded neatly in her purse. She had been thinking about stuffing—in the bird or out of the bird? Carol (who said that pregnancy had brought with it a great distaste for poultry) liked the stuffing (or had liked it) crumbling out from the bird; Walter preferred it fixed in a pan (dressing, it is called), because he said he hated the thought of scooping around inside the bird. He said he couldn’t stand to think of either end of the creature and refused to eat giblet gravy because he would not eat any of the *working parts*, no *organs*. Trey did not like for any two items to be touching on his plate, and often had to have lots of separate little bowls, as if he were in a cafeteria. He also talked a great deal about *roughage*. She was envisioning both—emptying the turkey out of Walter’s sight, but also having a nice pan of dressing cut into squares. She would prepare a huge salad and some bran muffins, and if that wasn’t enough roughage, would offer

a Metamucil cocktail. The ringing phone was an interruption, and she was slow to grasp the purpose of the call.

Oh, dear God, she remembers saying; with the phone cradled under her chin she had slowly and systematically shredded that paper turkey. She had stood, not knowing what to do with her hands or with the turkey that was thawing on the counter. That very morning she had changed the sheets on the bed. The pillows were fluffed to his liking, *TV Guide* was on the nightstand, clean pajamas were folded in his drawer. The thought of their bedroom, the minute details of their world, made her feel unbearably alive. Walter's raincoat was hanging in the hall. She ran past it to the stairs. Their bedroom was just as she had left it that morning, when the sun streamed through the window, and she was so sorry that she had not waited to wash, so terribly sorry that she had not left the sheets on the bed from the day before yesterday.

HE WAS STANDING IN THE KITCHEN WHEN THE phone rang, and then, within minutes, they all seemed to be there, these people, these children she had birthed while unconscious, with Walter in the waiting room chain-smoking with the other men—these children they had conceived in the darkness of their bed: Carol in that tiny studio apartment overlooking the A&P parking lot; Ben in their first house, the small two-bedroom Cape Cod where she'd left behind a rosebush she had brought from her grandmother's house (when she went back and requested it, the new owners refused); and finally Wayne, in a rented cottage one row back from the ocean, salt wind whipping the sticky drapes.

BEN CAME HOME WITHOUT THE GIRLFRIEND, AND the only thing Anna said to him that night was "How dare you ask to bring that trollop to my house when we still haven't gotten over your divorce?" She told Trey and Carol that if they didn't stop talking about gastrointestinal and psychiatric things, they would have to get out, they were making her sick. She told Wayne that she wished he'd pierce his other ear, so that she wouldn't have the inclination when looking at him to tilt her head in an attempt to make up for his lack of symmetry. She asked him please to guard her bedroom door so that no one would come in to talk to her or to try and get her to talk or eat or turn on a light. She didn't cook a turkey the next day; she didn't leave her room. It was the lousiest Thanksgiving known to man.

Walter's favorite movie was *Rear Window*. He said the movie reminded him of the way they had sat on the balcony of that rented beach house and watched the lights in the row of houses across the way. They had gone to the same house every summer while the kids were growing up. It was not a big house, just a small white wooden cot-

tage up on tall, spindly-looking pilings, a short walk from the pier.

"Well, I'm no Grace Kelly," Anna had said, and laughed. The first year they had watched an older couple across the way; they had laughed at the way the couple dressed for dinner, the woman in a floor-length floral skirt and the man in a white jacket and white shoes. "Like Pat Boone," Walter had howled. He was only thirty-six then, and his skin was a dark tan. "Imagine getting dressed up like that at the beach."

The couple became a joke for them, their own *Rear Window*. Each day Anna and Walter would sit on the beach (she under a striped umbrella) while Ben and Carol played in the sand and at the edge of the water. They would take turns glancing up at the big weathered house, each anxious to be the first to spy the couple, but the front shades remained drawn. "Maybe they're vampires," Walter whispered, and stretched out beside her, his skin sandy and sunburned. "Maybe they're spying on *us* right now, and they don't want to meet us because then we'll all just have ordinary, boring vacations."

"It's not so boring," she said, and yawned. "I love doing nothing." It was a wonderful feeling to collect their things and head up over the huge white dunes in the early afternoon. The kids ran ahead, stopping to examine shells and the wild roses that grew close by, while she and Walter followed, drawn by the thought of a cool shower and a nap. Once, when Wayne was nine, he had asked them *why* they decided to have him. Anna looked over at Walter, but he didn't look like someone on the verge of speaking. "We wanted another baby," she said. "That's all we could talk about that summer at the beach, how we wanted another baby." Walter grinned at her, eyebrows raised with the silent truth: they had been delirious with joy when the children finally closed their little eyes and mouths and slept like lambs. They had been careless, wild and reckless, thinking that if something did happen, they'd deal with it later. The nearest drugstore was a twenty-minute drive, and there just wasn't always time enough to be prepared.

IN THE LATE AFTERNOONS, WHEN THE BEACH WAS empty, the older couple strolled out, cocktail glasses in hand, and sat on their deck. When the sun set, they got in their car and left for a late-night dinner. Anna and Walter imagined them driving over to a friend's house, maybe one of the large antebellum homes just inland, where they would sit and sip champagne. By now Walter had nicknamed them "the Vanderbilts." With the children tucked in, Anna and Walter sat on their own tiny deck and waited for the Vanderbilts' return. They took turns using an old telescope to zero in on the lights of the pier; one night, before a circle of people blocked their view, they saw a man catch what looked like a shark. Another night they spotted a



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young couple kissing below the bait shop, the woman's back against one of the pilings. Walter imagined that at least one of them was married, that their affair was illicit; Anna said they were teenagers trying things out for the first time. They would have bet except that they had no way of learning the truth. They sat with their telescope, the transistor radio playing, until the headlights came around a curve. The Vanderbilts always returned just before midnight. Their lights went out half an hour later.

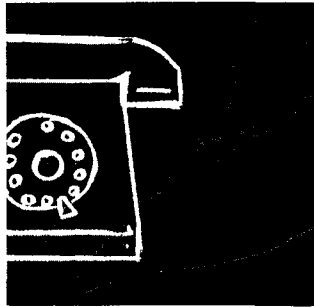
The last day of vacation Anna suggested that they follow the couple on their nightly outing. As soon as the couple appeared on their deck, cocktails in hand, Anna started getting ready. Carol and Ben were in the back seat singing and screaming (they were going to get ice cream), and Anna and Walter took turns fiddling with something (he under the hood, she running back into the house) until the couple across the street prepared to leave. Finally the Lincoln pulled out, and Anna and Walter let it get a good block down the road before they pulled out and began following. Anna was excited, ready for a lengthy expedition that might take them who knew where, only to be disappointed five minutes later, when the Lincoln turned into Brady's Seafood, an old establishment adorned with plastic fish and nets and offering several varieties of fried food. Walter turned off the headlights, the car still idling, as they watched the man walk around to open his companion's door. Her floral evening skirt glistened under the streetlights as the couple walked to the big glass door. Inside they would be met by the glare of ceiling lights on Formica, the smell of fish and a vat of reheated grease.

"Disappointed?" Walter asked, as he turned their station wagon around, flipped on the headlights, and drove to the Tastee Freeze next to a Putt-Putt Golf range. They sat on a bench and let the kids run around on the little green course. "They deserve better, don't they?" he asked, and she suddenly felt very protective of these complete strangers. "Maybe they're happy," she said. "What do we know?" That remark was used often over the next twenty-five years. It was what Walter always said to her (reminding her) if she commented on someone else's life. It's what she imagines people are saying about *her* life, now that she is all alone in public places.

SHE HAS SPENT THREE YEARS WITHOUT WALTER, and she has finally adjusted to the shock. She has gotten used to the largeness of the bed, the quiet ticking of the clock which his snores and breathing had always hidden. Still, she comes to loud public places in order to absorb the emotions. People in airports cry and hug—*Look at you!* They lean and wave—*I thought you'd never get here!* People at political rallies or

marches smile and cheer one another on as if they had a relationship. All you have to do is clap at the right time, raise your hand in affirmation or rejection at the right time. People in the mall are absorbed into the fluorescent lights and water fountains.

Now Carol has had a second boy (Brandon), in addition to her first one (William the Fourth), and she stays at home with them while Trey sits and records people's problems out in his black-and-white office, which used to be the garage. Carol wears children the way most people wear arms and legs. She is already talking about having another. Anna can't imagine that Carol and Trey have



ever done anything reckless. All these children are planned, one right after another. Carol never talks about anything else these days. Carol never says, *What do you miss most about Dad? What would be your pick of a day if you could have one?* Instead Carol says, "Trey and I have got to get a new diaper service, we don't like the way this service folds—there's always a wrinkle in the front. We fear they use really strong detergents, too, or else how

do they get the diapers so white? Trey says I can just keep searching until I find the perfect service, no matter the cost. Isn't he wonderful?"

Anna says, "Well, Carol, if I could have any day with your father, I'd pick a day in July that very summer that we surprised ourselves and I got pregnant with Wayne. Your dad would tiptoe in on you and Ben to make sure you were completely out, and then he'd come flying back, lock our door, jump in the bed, and there we'd be, laughing and whispering and doing anything we pleased. If I could've bought Huggies, I would've."

"Mom, I can't let Kim and William and Brandon eat canned spaghetti. When you said you had spaghetti, I thought you meant *real* spaghetti." Carol stands there, her eyes as blue as Walter's, her nose with the same slope. When she was a child, she ate canned spaghetti all the time. Anna looks at the open can and puts it on the counter. She wants to say, *Your father and I would go after each other like crazed rabbits and we wouldn't stop until we fell out with exhaustion or until one of you started calling from the other room, whichever came first*, but instead she tells Carol that if she wants *real* spaghetti, that if Chef Boyardee, who has been around longer than Trey, is not good enough, then she'll have to do her own shopping and cooking.

BEN, AFTER A SERIES OF LIVE-IN GIRLFRIENDS, met and married somebody who looked and sounded just like all the others. They moved to Alaska, where he teaches history. His wife teaches arts and crafts in the prison there, and for Christmas she sent Anna a pendant carved from ivory. It's an awkward ele-

phant, so large, she thinks, that it might knock her out if she forgot and bent over too fast—that is, if she ever wore it. Terri (the wife, whom she has met only once) sent a history of the elephant: *This was carved by a reformed alcoholic named Ike who is serving a life sentence for murdering his wife, mother, and child. Ike has found religion and sees his art as a manifestation of his cleansed soul. He is a new man.*

Though the children at school would probably love this atrocity the same way they love her loud parrot pin, Anna will not touch it with a ten-foot pole. Imagine, writing to *tell* her such a thing. Didn't they know that she would only stare at the misshapen piece of junk and ask why such a man is living and breathing and whittling his animal tusks while Walter, who was the epitome of sanity and goodness, is gone? Were it not for the fear that she would completely alienate her son and his free-spirited wife, she would throw the elephant out in the trash. Instead she keeps it in its box, in the drawer where she keeps a photo of Ben's first wife, a cute, quiet, conventional woman who wanted to settle somewhere and spend her life there.

"That's not so much for her to ask," Walter had told Ben when he announced with anger that they were separated, that she was asking too much of him. "What is it you're looking for?"

Wayne, after only a few months practicing law, decided he didn't want to be a lawyer and instead went back to school to get an M.B.A. Now he's considering becoming a CPA. What happened to the normal child? She keeps asking the question and wishing that Walter could answer. Anna recently asked Wayne why he didn't drive his BMW while eating a BLT to the YMCA for a little R&R—or, better yet, why didn't he find a nice young woman who could give him some TLC? What she has found out most recently is that Wayne is more interested in finding a nice young man, and she thinks she can live with all that. She is convinced she can live with just about anything. It's what she can't live without that poses a problem.

THE SUMMER AFTER WAYNE WAS BORN, THEY went back to the small cottage. Anna spent most of the vacation on the screened porch with Wayne in her arms, his tiny body shielded from the salty breeze by a cotton blanket. It was midweek before they saw any lights on in the house across the way. Several cars were in the drive (the Lincoln was in the garage, but they never saw it move), and the beach in front of the house was peppered with children of all ages. Anna had a lot of time to watch while Walter was out swimming with the kids and she was left behind in the shade of the porch. All day long people came and went, but she saw no sign of the couple from the year before, other than their car.

Finally, late one afternoon, the woman came out on

the deck. She stood and held tightly to the rail as if the wind might whip her out to sea. She stood that way for what seemed an eternity, and then a younger woman—someone who was probably Anna's age—came out and took her by the arm. Anna's involvement in the scene was interrupted by Wayne's cries. She had a diaper to change, a baby to nurse, two children to bathe and dress and entertain.

"Mr. Vanderbilt left her," Anna said to her skeptical husband over a dinner of steamed shrimp, which the children would not eat, and french fries, which they would. "She's all alone. He ran off with his very young secretary, and where does that leave her?" Anna was trying hard to make a joke of what she had seen, but the humor was impossible to find.

"I think he died," Walter said, and she turned, her expression matching his. They both sat quietly, fries and catsup all over the plastic tablecloth that came with the house. "Yeah, he's dead all right," Walter said. "She's too peaceful for him not to be. If he'd just left her, she'd be furious, breaking things, screaming for the lawyers. He died all right." It was a feeble joke, and though Anna laughed, she felt the tears spring to her eyes without warning.

Summer after summer they came to the same house, catching glimpses of the woman, who came outside less and less. The Lincoln was no longer in the garage. With each passing summer the children across the street got bigger, and then they were doing things with Carol and Ben and Wayne. Carol reported that the house belonged to the kids' grandmother; there were twelve cousins in all. The children were still so young then: Ben down at the Putt-Putt range or at the pavilion, playing pinball; Carol reading magazines with a girlfriend and talking about how no man would keep her from being an astronaut if that's what she decided to be; Wayne out riding the waves on a Styrofoam board. In her worst scenarios tragedy came to them from beyond the boundaries and frames of their everyday lives: a car running a red light, an airplane engine dying, Ben drafted and dropped in a jungle, a stray bomb planted in a building where they happened to be visiting, a lunatic firing a submachine gun in a fast-food restaurant. But instead it came from within, from a heart that had never threatened anything except too much love, a fragile, easily broken organ.

"SEE YOU TONIGHT, HONEY." THAT'S THE LAST thing Walter said to her, and she has spent countless moments playing back the phone conversation, imagining that unwitnessed day. Why didn't *she* feel something? Why didn't she, while singing songs of praise and drawing turkeys and Pilgrim hats, get a sudden rush of gooseflesh, a tightening in her own chest?

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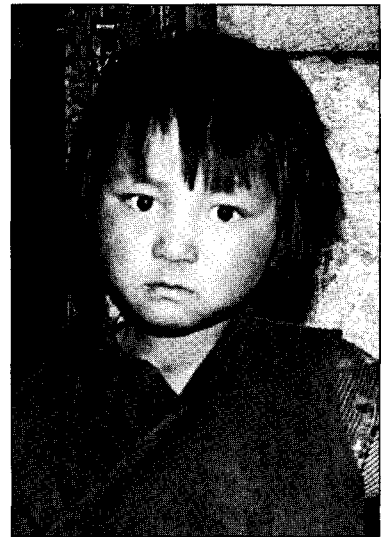
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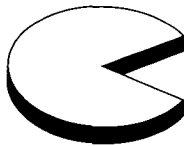
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NOW SHE STEPS UP WHERE A CROWD HAS GATHERED in the center of the mall and is watching the closed curtains of a stage. People are pushing, standing on tiptoe, to get a better look. WELCOME! a big banner says, and another says EAT TO WIN! All of a sudden a little man in a white jumpsuit jumps from behind the curtain and bounces around, waving and circling his arms at his fans. It's the Exercise Man; she has seen him on TV. A great many people are lined up to catch a glimpse of him. She pulls her purse around in front of her and eases out of the crowd, goes down to the other end of the mall, to a petting zoo. Young mothers are there with little ones who reach out and then shrink back from the hungry tongue of a billy goat.

"I WORRY ABOUT WAYNE," HE HAD SAID ON THE phone. It was early morning. She sat on the bed in her gown and robe, a cup of freshly made coffee on the nightstand. Out the window she could see the dogwood tree, leaves bright red, and down below the school bus stopping for a crowd of children who filed up the steps and in through the narrow door, their arms filled with lunch boxes and notebooks. She had a stack of construction paper on her dresser; the children would spend the time during the day's lesson tracing their hands to make turkey feathers. "I just don't think he seems satisfied."

"He will when he's taken that test," she told him. They had visited Wayne once during law school at Columbia, and he had spent the whole visit locked in his room, "studying," though they'd heard him make many phone calls. They had just gone ahead and ventured out as tourists, seeing everything one could possibly see in Manhattan in twenty-four hours. That night, after an early dinner, Wayne went back to his studying and they sat nursing their sore feet and vowing that the next trip would last longer. They had made the same promise just the year before, when she went with Walter to San Francisco. Walter had an early meeting, but then they rented a car and set out to see the city. They were determined to see everything from Alcatraz to Chinatown. Walter sang like Tony Bennett every time they saw a cable car. They had raced through downtown Seattle the year before that. They loved the West Coast and had always talked about taking another trip—a long, relaxing, childless trip—as soon as Wayne passed the bar. *Son, I've got to tell you*, Walter said the day they were leaving New York, *I've never been able to pass a bar*.

"I hope that test is all that's bugging him," Walter said that morning on the phone. "He'll be home soon." That's when she looked at the clock and told him that she had to hurry, she was going to be late, somebody had to work.

"See you tonight, honey."

HE THINKS NOW THAT WALTER WAS ON TO WAYNE. He always seemed to *know* things. On Ben's first wedding day he said that he felt the marriage would never work; he couldn't put his finger on it, but something was wrong. *Carol will never go back to school if she marries this Trey fellow*, he had said. *This Trey fellow wants a woman in the house. I can tell. It may take a dozen children and shackles, but he'll find a way*. Sometimes it makes her mad that he knew so damn much, was so perceptive about their children, could tell from her physical stance what mood she was in (uh-oh, the limp-wristed hand on the hip means depressed; straight wrist is mad as hell), but at the most important moment, when he might have sensed the danger that would rob him, her, all of them, he hadn't had a clue.

The first year was the hardest. Each day was an anniversary. Each day was a countdown of events. Nothing could pull her away from the timetable leading up to or away from his death. Her children tried. They took turns dumping the events of their lives at her feet, but she wouldn't be deflected. She got tired of listening to what was going on in their lives. She wanted her own life. She wanted to be a part of something, real or not, that was of her own design. She had to get out, go places, watch people. In her mind she wrote long letters to the woman at the beach. *How could you just stand there?* she asked. *How could you be at peace?*

Now the third year is closing. Thanksgiving is around the corner. It's time to decide what kind of stuffing or dressing to prepare. But nothing equals a mall or an airport during the holidays. Both are bustling with people, and emotions are soaring. On the days she doesn't work, she alternates between the two. Carol says, "But *why* were you at the airport?" and Anna tells her that the airport is filled with wonderful stores, that people shouldn't ask so many questions so close to the holidays. That was Walter's line. He had used it on the children from October 1 to December 25, diverting their curiosity with what seemed the promise of a present. Her children want her to be a perfect widow, to be led in and out of the house like the woman at the beach. Anna imagines Mrs. Vanderbilt living out the rest of her life in silent composure as she yearns for those late afternoons with her husband, their dinners at Brady's Seafood, so long and so hard that she loses all of what had made her the person she was.

Children are so selfish, the way they want to lead you around and keep your mind occupied with latch hooks or Phil Donahue. Carol says, *Why don't you get interested in a continuing program?* (meaning a soap opera). Trey disagrees with Carol's suggestion of *regular* programs. (He says he hopes she isn't watching such trash when he's out in the garage working!) He suggests that Anna watch the Public Broadcasting System (*British* soap operas). Ben and Terri suggest that she choose a craft (ivory carving has done wonders for some people). Wayne says she'd be

great at the soup kitchen, a breath of life for the down-and-out. *And who will give me a breath?* she asks.

Her children don't want her to talk about Walter anymore. They don't want her to talk about how he looked in the casket. She keeps saying, "He looked okay, but his mouth was wrong. Walter never held his mouth that way a day of his life."

"Really, mother," Carol says, and Anna wants to slap her, to shake her, to tell her, *For God's sake get a divorce*. And Ben says, "Really, mother," and she wants to ask how they can be so sympathetic to an alcoholic who murdered his family and not to a woman who had a wonderful, happy marriage (complete with wonderful sex and happy private jokes) to a wonderful man and who wants to talk about it. Wayne says, "Really, mother," and she wants to shake him, to ask how a son of hers and Walter's went such a route, holes in his ears and men on his arms. She wants to say, *Don't tell me what loneliness means. Don't you even try*. Dear God. Some nights she can't sleep because her mind flashes picture after picture, like slides.

Walter. Wayne as an infant. Walter looking down at her, sheets twisted around their legs. Wayne running toward them with his suitcase, happy to leave summer camp, never to go again. Walter's eyes closing as he exhales, his heart beating rapidly, her hands on his back, pulling him toward her. Wayne in a shiny blue graduation gown. Walter's eyes closed as his heart beats rapidly, the telephone cord beyond his grasp, and Wayne with a male lover, sheets twisted around their legs. She shudders and cries out, unable to bear either picture.

SHE IS AT THE AIRPORT AT A GATE THAT IS crowded. Sunlight is streaming through the big glass windows. She sees a man with a bouquet of flowers. A young girl wearing fatigue pants and a tight black T-shirt is slouched in a chair with her tote bag on the seat beside her. She's reading a self-help book (*Making a Place for Yourself*) and will probably do so all the way to Dallas (Anna can read the boarding pass she clutches). Somewhere in this world (somewhere in Dallas-Fort Worth, maybe) this girl has a place and someone is waiting for her; her name is running through that person's mind this very minute. The last time Anna was here she watched a lost child. The little girl's description was given over the loudspeaker time after time as an airport employee hugged her and tried to get her to stop crying.

While the child sobbed, Anna watched and wondered what Walter would have said when Wayne announced that he had a male lover. Alone, she had held her breath and counted long seconds, swallowed, focused. She said, "We . . ." and then faltered over the plural. "We want you to be happy, Wayne. Nothing more." If Walter had

been there, his large strong arm around her, she would not have been so understanding and sensitive. She would not have thought to remind herself how fragile it all is, fragile and precious. The lost child was red-faced. Her nose was running onto the stuffed toy she clutched. The airport employee looked at Anna and shook her head. "Can you believe this?" she asked. "Can you imagine a parent not keeping a better watch?"

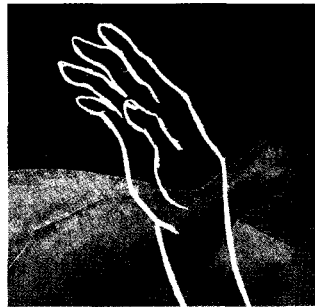
"Oh, God, there you are!" A woman rushed into the area, her face white and frantic, mascara ringing her eyes. "Oh, baby, baby." She grabbed the child and then turned to the airport employee. "My husband thought I had her." She was explaining, out of breath and needing to redeem herself. "I thought she was with him." The husband was there within seconds, a trail of suitcases strewn behind him as he wrapped his arms around the two. "Thank God," the man said.

Sometimes Anna imagines that she will turn in a crowded place and see him there, that they will reach for each other with a babbling of how it was all a misunderstanding, that he didn't really die. "Oh, thank God," she sometimes wakes up saying, thinking that the dream—he was checking the air in her car tires—is reality, and the empty bed is not.

"SEE YOU TONIGHT, HONEY," WALTER SAYS, AND hangs up the phone. He turns to the simple, moderately priced room. On the table by the window is his breakfast, orange juice and toast. He loves eggs and bacon but he is watching his cholesterol. He quit smoking years ago. He walks at least a mile a day. He does everything just the way it's supposed to be done. In the closet are his blue suit, white shirt, red paisley tie. He has been traveling for years. The insurance business has been good to him, good to them financially. Retirement is just around the corner.

I LEFT MY HEART IN SAN FRANCISCO. THE THIRD-grade teacher thought it was an odd selection but couldn't help smiling at the chorus. They drew pictures, hearts like valentines, riding up to the stars. "You can't leave your heart nowhere," a boy, still pink-faced from recess, said, and he grinned. "You'd die." He laughed, the whole class joining in. The teacher looked at Anna in a shocked, worried way, which Anna brushed off with a wave of her hand. She thought of Mrs. Vanderbilt, her hands firm on the railing, her chin lifted as she stared out at the ocean.

"That's true," she said. "You would die without your heart."



"Oh, no." A girl at the front shook her head, her hand up to her chest as if to check her own beating heart, while Anna attempted to explain *figurative*.

"What's a cable car?" another child asked.

NOW PEOPLE ARE FILING THROUGH THE JET-way door, spilling into the hall with waves and shrieks. The man who has stood so quietly with the bouquet is moving forward, arms reaching for a young woman in blue jeans, her hair cropped in a thick blunt cut. "I thought I'd never get here," she says, and kisses him full on the mouth, the flowers pressed between them. The girl in fatigues looks around as if annoyed by all the chatter and goes back to her book. Her flight can't board until all these people have gotten off and the plane is tidied.

Anna thinks of the couple reunited with their lost child as if she knows them, as if they are distant relatives. She imagines them at home, their house recently painted, a yard recently mowed, a bed with sheets just washed, their dinner thawing in the kitchen. They have gotten over what happened at the airport and have stopped studying each other with the unspoken, unintended accusation; but they still realize with a sudden rush of horror all the things that *could* have happened that day. "You have such a morbid mind, sweetheart," Walter once said. The kids were at camp and she kept expecting a phone call: a broken arm, salmonella, stitches in the chin.

BUT THAT MORNING, AS SHE COLLECTED HER construction paper and went to school, she had no such thoughts, no expectations of what was to come. She tries so hard to see it all. "See you tonight, honey," he says, and he hangs up the receiver. She imagines a hotel bedspread with matching striped drapes, Art Deco prints in chrome frames. He would have the drapes open, with the sunlight coming through. He would stand in front of the window and watch people on the street below. Maybe someone was watching him across the way. Maybe someone in another building saw him turn suddenly. He felt sick and he turned to put down his coffee, he reached for the phone, their familiar number going through his mind like a secret message or song, but he didn't get there. Everywhere Anna looks she sees the message: life is fragile, so very, very fragile. She watches the people exit, the crowd thinning temporarily before those departing make their way to the gate. Already the couple with the bouquet is at the end of the hallway, arms entwined as the flowers swing back and forth. Now the girl in the fatigues sits up straight, clutching her boarding pass.

"You going to Dallas?" the girl asks, and Anna is startled. She turns quickly from the big glass window and shakes her head. "Are you?"

"Yeah." The girl's voice is much higher than Anna would have expected, much younger. "Unfortunately."

"Oh." Anna waits for an explanation, but the girl doesn't give it.

"I guess your person missed the flight," the girl says, and points to the closed door.

"Yes." Anna feels the need to move now, to push herself down the hall and outside into the fresh autumn air. "I hope you have a good trip."

The girl smirks, runs a hand through her short, stiff hair. "I won't. It's my dad. You know I *have* to go spend that weekend once every three months." She waits for Anna to nod and then goes back to her book.

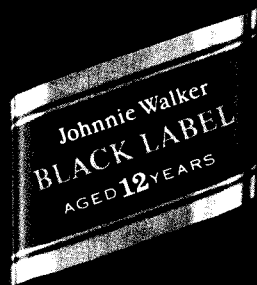
Anna begins walking. By the time of her next visit here she will have constructed a setting for this girl, in which she will be happily reunited with her father. The father and girl will ask in amazement why they haven't seen years ago how silly their problems are. They are parent and child—family. They will drive into Dallas and eat at a fine restaurant. Now Anna feels like a ghost, like someone haunting someone else's life, and so she concentrates on turkey and stuffing and her own children and grandchildren and schoolchildren, and how she needs to construct or reconstruct her own scene. It's been exactly three years; now the fourth begins. She is aware of details she will forget and need to reinvent in a simpler, gentler way. It will be a smoother progression, the nerves worn down. She passes gate after gate, each one identical.

If she could pick a time, they would load the station wagon and drive to the coast, the kids crowded in the back seat. It would be a long, bright day—the children's squeals muffled by the roar of the surf—followed by a cool shower and a nap. And in the late afternoon, as the children sat in a circle playing cards, as Walter still napped, she would cross the street and go stand by Mrs. Vanderbilt on the deck. She would take notes on loneliness (is it really possible to live with it?) and then rush back to her own bed to find Walter there, her love reaffirmed with his every breath.

Anna decides while walking the long hallway that she will not stuff her turkey. She will have a turkey breast; she will make a pan of dressing on the side. She will not have to put the heart, liver, and gizzard (those working parts) into her gravy, because she won't have them in the first place. People are boarding at gate C-10. She will bake a chocolate cake so big and so rich that everyone will need to lie down right after dinner. They will nap and she will sit quietly on the patio, content to rest after a busy day, relieved to have some silence after all the talk, all the questions she has asked her children about their lives. She sees a young woman in the hallway, her beige pumps a perfect match with her suit, diamond ring flashing on her smooth young hand. "See you tomorrow night," she calls, and blows a kiss to the tall, dark-haired man stepping into the boarding tunnel. He lifts a hand and is gone. □



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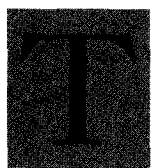
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Most people think of inner-city poverty as a black phenomenon. But it is also alarmingly high among Puerto Ricans, the worst-off ethnic group in the country—even though Puerto Rico itself has made great progress against poverty and there is a growing Puerto Rican middle class on the mainland

THE OTHER UNDERCLASS

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

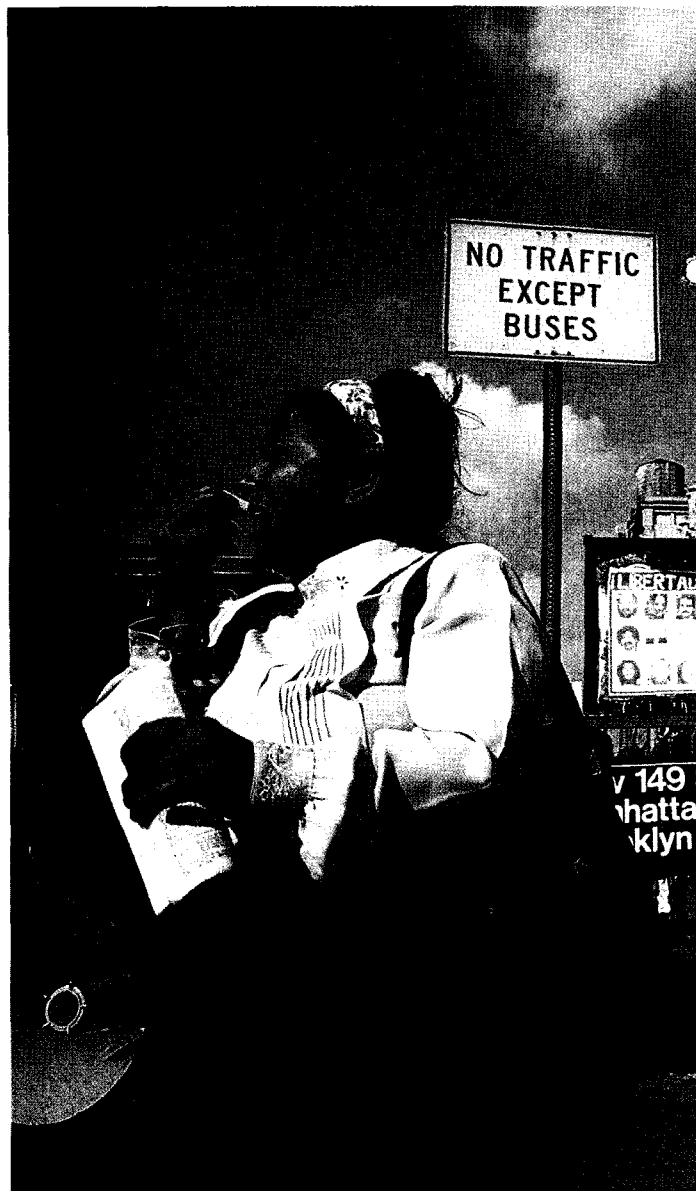


THE TERM "HISPANIC," WHICH IS USED TO describe Spanish-speaking American ethnic groups—mainly Mexican-Americans, but also Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and immigrants from other Latin

American countries—may wind up having only a brief run in common parlance. It has been in official governmental use for only a few years; the Census Bureau did not extensively use the term "Hispanic" until the 1980 census. Now it faces two threats: First, although most Hispanic groups are comfortable with the term, another name, "Latino," is gaining favor, especially on campuses, because it implies that Latin America has a distinctive indigenous culture, rather than being just a stepchild of Spain. Second, the very idea that it is useful to try to understand all Americans with Spanish-speaking backgrounds as members of a single group tends to crumble on examination.

Cubans, who are much more prosperous than the other Hispanic subgroups, have now risen above the national mean in family income. They are concentrated in Florida. Mexican-Americans, who make up about two thirds of the country's 22.4 million Hispanics, live mainly in the Southwest, especially California and Texas. Puerto Ricans are the second-largest Hispanic group—2.75 million people in the mainland United States. A third of them live in one city—New York.

As soon as the Hispanic category is broken down by group, what leaps out at anyone who takes even a casual look at the census data is that Puerto Ricans are the worst-off ethnic group in the United States. For a period



in the mid-1980s nearly half of all Puerto Rican families were living in poverty. It seems commonsensical that for Hispanics poverty would be a function of their unfamiliarity with the mainland United States, inability to speak English, and lack of education. But Mexican-Americans, who are no more proficient in English than Puerto Ricans, less likely to have finished high school, and more likely to have arrived here very recently, have a much lower poverty rate. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported earlier this year that, as the newsletter of a leading Puerto Rican organization put it, "On almost every health indicator . . . Puerto Ricans fared worse" than Mexican-Americans or Cubans. Infant mortality was 50 percent higher than among Mexican-Americans, and nearly three times as high as among Cubans.

The statistics also show Puerto Ricans to be much more severely afflicted than Mexican-Americans by what might be called the secondary effects of poverty, such as



149th Street and Third Avenue: the center of Puerto Rican New York

welfare, and are about 50 percent more likely to be poor. In the mainland United States, Puerto Ricans have nothing like the black institutional network of colleges, churches, and civil-rights organizations; there isn't a large cadre of visible Puerto Rican successes in nearly every field; black politicians are more powerful than Puerto Rican politicians in all the cities with big Puerto Rican populations; and there is a feeling that blacks have America's attention, whereas Puerto Ricans, after a brief flurry of publicity back in *West Side Story* days, have become invisible.

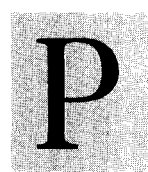
The question of why poverty is so widespread, and so persistent, among Puerto Ricans is an urgent one, not only for its own sake but also because the answer to it might prove to be a key to understanding the broader problem of the urban underclass. "Underclass" is a supposedly nonracial term, but by most definitions the underclass is mostly black, and discussions of it are full of racial undercurrents. Given the history of American race relations, it is nearly impossible for people to consider issues like street crime, unemployment, the high school dropout rate, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy without reopening a lot of ancient wounds. To seek an explanation for poverty among Puerto Ricans rather than blacks may make possible a truly deracialized grasp of what most experts agree is a non-

family breakups, and not trying to find employment—which work to ensure that poverty will continue beyond one generation. In 1988 females headed 44 percent of Puerto Rican families, as opposed to 18 percent of Mexican-American families. Mexican-Americans had a slightly higher unemployment rate, but Puerto Ricans had a substantially higher rate in the sociologically ominous category "labor force non-participation," meaning the percentage of people who haven't looked for a job in the previous month.

Practically everybody in America feels some kind of emotion about blacks, but Puerto Rican leaders are the only people I've ever run across for whom the emotion is pure envy. In New York City, black median family income is substantially higher than Puerto Rican, and is rising more rapidly. The black home-ownership rate is more than double the Puerto Rican rate. Puerto Rican families are more than twice as likely as black families to be on

race-specific problem. Although there is no clear or agreed-upon answer, the case of Puerto Ricans supports the view that being part of the underclass in the United States is the result of a one-two punch of economic factors, such as unemployment and welfare, and cultural ones, such as neighborhood ambience and ethnic history.

The First Emigration



PUERTO RICO WAS INHABITED SOLELY BY Arawak Indians until 1493, when Christopher Columbus visited it on his second voyage to the New World. The island became a Spanish colony, and it remained one until 1898. In that year an autonomous Puerto Rican government was set up, with Spain's blessing, but it functioned for only a few days; American troops invaded during the Spanish-American War and the

island became a possession of the United States shortly thereafter. The U.S. conquest of Puerto Rico was not the bloody kind that resonates psychologically through the generations; there was little resistance, and the arrival of the troops was cheered in many places. In 1917 all Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship and allowed to elect a senate, but until after the Second World War the island was run by a series of colonial governors sent from Washington.

During this period Puerto Rico underwent an economic transformation, as big U.S. sugar companies came in and established plantations. Previously the island's main crops had been grown on small subsistence farms up in the hills. The sugar plantations induced thousands of people to move down to the coastal lowlands, where they became what the anthropologist Sidney Mintz calls a "rural proletariat," living in hastily constructed shantytowns and often paid in company scrip. The most salient feature of Puerto Rico throughout the first half of the twentieth century, at least in the minds of non-Puerto Ricans, was its extreme poverty and overpopulation. "What I found appalled me," John Gunther wrote, in *Inside Latin America* (1941), about his visit to Puerto Rico. "I saw native villages steaming with filth—villages dirtier than any I ever saw in the most squalid parts of China. . . . I saw children bitten by disease and on the verge of starvation, in slum dwellings—if you can call them dwellings—that make the hovels of Calcutta look healthy by comparison." Gunther reported that more than half of Puerto Rican children of school age didn't go to school, that the island had the highest infant-mortality rate in the world, and that it was the second most densely populated place on earth, after Java.

From such beginnings Puerto Rico became, after the Second World War, one of the great economic and political successes of the Latin American Third World. The hero of the story is Luis Muñoz Marín (the son of the most important Puerto Rican political leader of the early twentieth century), who founded the biggest Puerto Rican political party and, after the United States decided to allow the island to elect its own governor, was the first Puerto Rican to rule Puerto Rico, which he did from 1949 to 1964. Muñoz was the leading proponent of the idea of commonwealth status, as opposed to statehood or independence, for Puerto Rico. Under the system he helped to institute, Puerto Ricans forfeited some rights of U.S. citizenship, such as eligibility for certain federal social-welfare programs and the right to participate in national politics,

and in return remained free of certain responsibilities, mainly that of paying federal income taxes. (Local taxes have always been high.)

Muñoz's main goal was the economic development of the island. He accomplished it by building up the educational system tremendously at all levels, by using the tax breaks to induce U.S. companies to locate manufacturing plants in Puerto Rico, and perhaps (here we enter a realm where the absolute truth is hard to know) by encouraging mass emigration. Michael Lapp, a professor at the College of New Rochelle, unearthed memoranda from several members of Muñoz's circle of advisers during the 1940s in which they discuss schemes to foster large-scale emigration from Puerto Rico as a way of alleviating the overpopulation problem. "They speculated about the possibility of resettling a breathtakingly large number of people," Lapp wrote in his doctoral dissertation, and described several never-realized plans to create agricultural colonies for hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans elsewhere in Latin America.

It's doubtful that the Muñoz government would ever have been able to export Puerto Ricans en masse to Brazil or the Dominican Republic, but in any case the issue became moot, because heavy voluntary emigration to an extremely nonagricultural venue—New York City—was soon under way. In 1940 New York had 70,000 Puerto Rican residents, in 1950 it had 250,000, and in 1960 it had 613,000. In general, what brought people there was economic prospects vastly less dismal than those in Puerto Rico. Back home, at the outset of the migration, industrialization was still in its very early stages, sugar prices were depressed, and thousands of people who had moved from the hills to the lowlands a generation earlier now had to move again, to notorious slums on the outskirts of urban areas, such as La Perla ("the pearl") and El Fanguito ("the little mudhole"). "The whole peasantry of Puerto Rico was displaced," says Ramón Daubón,

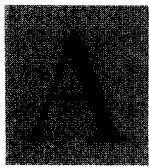


Sugarcane for sale in the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx

a former vice-president of the National Puerto Rican Coalition. Among Muñoz's many works was the construction of high-rise housing projects to replace the slums, but during the peak years of Puerto Rican emigration little decent housing for the poor was available locally.

In particular what set off the migration was the institution of cheap air travel between San Juan and New York. During the 1940s and 1950s a one-way ticket from San Juan to New York could be bought for less than \$50, and installment plans were available for those without enough cash on hand. Muñoz's government may not have invented the emigration, but it did do what it could to help it along—first by allowing small local airlines to drive down air fares, and second by opening, in 1948, a Migration Division in New York, which was supposed to help Puerto Ricans find jobs and calm any mainland fears about the migration which might lead to its being restricted, as had been every previous large-scale migration of an ethnic group in the twentieth century.

The South Bronx Becomes the South Bronx



THE FIRST THE CENTER OF PUERTO RICAN New York was 116th Street and Third Avenue, in East Harlem. This was part of the congressional district of Vito Marcantonio, the furthest-to-the-left member of the House of Representatives and a staunch friend of the Puerto Ricans. A rumor of the time was that he was "bringing them up" because Italian-Americans were moving out of Harlem and he needed a new group of loyal constituents. But the migration increased after Marcantonio lost his seat in the 1950 election. By the end of the 1950s the Puerto Rican center had begun to shift two miles to the north, to 149th Street and Third Avenue, in the Bronx, which is where it is today.

At the time, the South Bronx was not a recognized district. A series of neighborhoods at the southern tip of the Bronx—Mott Haven, Hunts Point, Melrose—were home to white ethnics who had moved there from the slums of Manhattan, as a step up the ladder. These neighborhoods were mostly Jewish, Italian, and Irish. Most of the housing stock consisted of tenement houses, but they were nicer tenements than the ones on the Lower East Side and in Hell's Kitchen. From there the next move was usually to the lower-middle-class northern and eastern Bronx, or to Queens. During the boom years after the Second World War whites were leaving the South Bronx in substantial numbers. Meanwhile, urban renewal was displacing many blacks and Puerto Ricans from Manhattan, and the city was building new high-rise public housing—much of it in the South Bronx. During the mid-1960s another persistent rumor was that Herman Badillo, who had been appointed the city's relocation commissioner in 1961, tried to engineer the placement of

as many Puerto Ricans as possible in the South Bronx, so that he would have a base from which to run for office. (Badillo was elected borough president of the Bronx in 1965, and in 1970 he became the first Puerto Rican elected to the U.S. Congress.)

For most of the Puerto Ricans moving to the South Bronx, though, the neighborhood was just what it had been for the area's earlier occupants—a step up (usually from East Harlem). All through the 1950s and 1960s it was possible to see Puerto Ricans as a typical rising American immigrant group (rising more slowly than most, perhaps), and their relocation to the South Bronx was part of the evidence. The idea that New York was going to be continually inundated by starving Puerto Rican peasants for whom there was no livelihood at home had faded, because spectacular progress was being made back on the island: per capita income increased sixfold from 1940 to 1963; the percentage of children attending school rose to 90.

In a new preface for the 1970 edition of *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote, "Puerto Ricans are economically and occupationally worse off than Negroes, but one does find a substantial move in the second generation that seems to correspond to what we expected for new groups in the city." In keeping with the standard pattern for immigrants, Puerto Ricans were beginning to achieve political power commensurate with their numbers in the city. And the War on Poverty and the Model Cities program created a small but important new cache of jobs for Puerto Ricans which were more dignified and better-paying than jobs in the garment district and hotel dining rooms and on loading docks and vegetable farms.

But the 1970s were a nightmare decade in the South Bronx. The statistical evidence of Puerto Rican progress out of poverty evaporated. After rising in the 1960s, Puerto Rican median family income dropped during the 1970s. Family structure changed dramatically: the percentage of Puerto Ricans living in families headed by a single, unemployed parent went from 9.9 in 1960 and 10.1 in 1970 to 26.9 in 1980. The visible accompaniment to these numbers was the extraordinary physical deterioration of the South Bronx, mainly through arson. Jill Jonnes, in *We're Still Here: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of the South Bronx*, wrote:

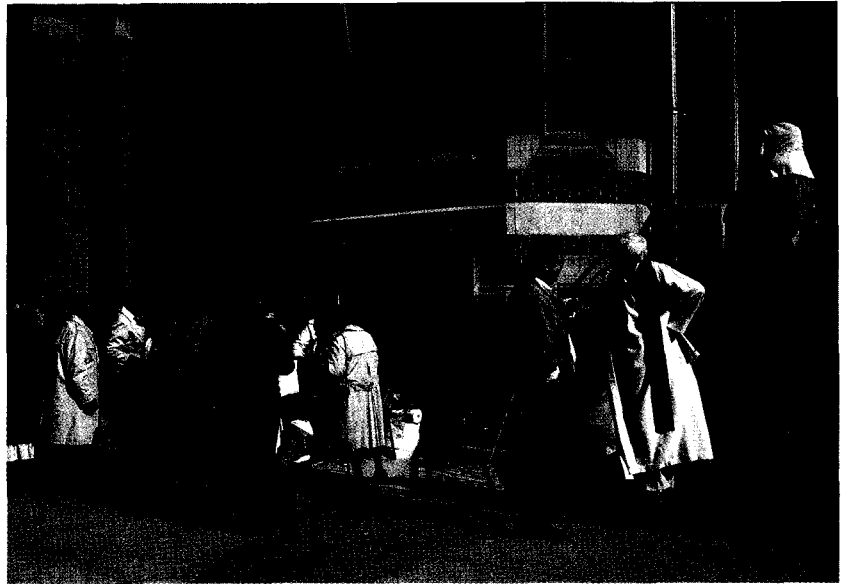
There was arson commissioned by landlords out for their insurance. . . . Arson was set by welfare recipients who wanted out of their apartments. . . . Many fires were deliberately set by junkies—and by that new breed of professional, the strippers of buildings, who wanted to clear a building so they could ransack the valuable copper and brass pipes, fixtures, and hardware. . . . Fires were set by firebugs who enjoyed a good blaze and by kids out for kicks. And some were set by those who got their revenge with fire, jilted lovers returning with a can of gasoline and a match. . . .

**The Reverend Louis Gigante
at St. Athanasius Church in Hunts Point**

Exact numbers are difficult to come by, but it seems safe to say that the South Bronx lost somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 housing units during the 1970s, and this produced the vistas of vacant, rubble-strewn city blocks by which the outside world knows the South Bronx. Two Presidents, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, paid well-publicized visits to burned-out Charlotte Street. Theories abound about why, exactly, the South Bronx burned: the excessive strictness of rent control in New York, the dispiriting effects of welfare and unemployment, the depredations of drugs. It is not necessary to choose among them to be able to say that the burning took place because most parties had abandoned any commitment to maintaining a functional society there. It is rare for the veneer of civilization to be eroded so rapidly anywhere during peacetime. Fernando Ferrer, the Bronx's borough president, says, "I remember in 1974 walking around Jennings Street. One weekend everything's going, stores, et cetera. The next week, boom, it's gone. It hit with the power of a locomotive. In '79, '80, it seemed like *every* god-damn thing was burning."

By virtue of the presidential visits and its location in New York City (and its prominence in *Bonfire of the Vanities*), the South Bronx has become the most famous slum in America. To visit it today is to be amazed by how much less completely devastated it is than we've been led to expect. The area around 149th Street and Third Avenue, which is known as the Hub, is a thriving retail district, complete with department stores and the usual *bodegas* (corner stores) and *botánicas* (shops selling religious items and magic potions). A neighborhood like Lawndale in Chicago, in contrast, hasn't had any substantial commercial establishments for more than twenty years. During the daytime the Hub area feels lively and safe. Also, there is new and rehabilitated housing all over the South Bronx, including incongruous ranch-style suburban houses lining Charlotte Street, row houses on Fox Street, and fixed-up apartment houses all over the old tenement districts from Hunts Point to Mott Haven.

What accounts for the signs of progress is, first, a decision during the prosperous 1980s by the administration of Mayor Ed Koch ("kicking and screaming," Ferrer says) to commit a sum in the low billions to the construction and rehabilitation of housing in the South Bronx. This has led to the opening of many thousands of new housing units. Some of them are very unpopular in the neighborhood, because they are earmarked to house homeless people who are being moved out of welfare hotels in Manhattan.



Community leaders in the Bronx grumble that there's a master plan to export Manhattan's problems to their neighborhood.

Several impressive community-development groups, including the Mid-Bronx Desperadoes, Bronx Venture Corporation, and Banana Kelly, have played a part in the rehabilitation of the neighborhood, by using funds from the city and foundations to fix up and then manage apartment buildings. Nationally, a generation's worth of efforts to redevelop urban slums haven't worked well on the whole. The lesson of the community groups' success in the Bronx seems to be that if the focus of redevelopment is on housing rather than job creation, and if there is money available to renovate the housing, and if the groups are permitted to function as tough-minded landlords, then living conditions in poor neighborhoods can be made much more decent.

The biggest community-development organization in the South Bronx is the South East Bronx Community Organization, which is run by Father Louis Gigante. Gigante, a Catholic priest, is a legendary figure in the Bronx. He is the brother of Vincent "The Chin" Gigante, the reputed head of the Genovese organized-crime family. He has been associated with St. Athanasius Church in Hunts Point since 1962, but he is an atypical priest: he is tough, combative, politically active (he served on the New York city council, and once ran for Congress), and immodest. The area surrounding St. Athanasius is an oasis of clean streets and well-kept housing, which Gigante runs in the manner of a benevolent dictator. He is known for his tough tenant-screening policy. "You've got to house a base of people with economic strength," he told me recently. "We look at family structure—how do they live? We visit everyone. We look in their background and see if there are extensive social problems, like drugs or a criminal record. Back in the late seventies, I'd only take ten or twelve percent of people

on some government subsidy—including pensions. I was looking for working-class people. You cannot put a whole massive group of social problems all together in one place. They're going to kill you. They're going to destroy you. They're going to eat you up with their problems."

For many years the politics of Hunts Point was dominated by a rivalry between Gigante and Ramon Velez, another legendary figure who was also a New York city councilman. Velez ran the Hunts Point Multi-Service Center, a large, government-funded social-services dispensary that provided him with a base of political-patronage jobs. Born in Puerto Rico, Velez came to the South Bronx as a welfare caseworker in 1961, the year before Gigante arrived. A fiery street-corner speaker, he quickly became the kind of up-from-the-streets community leader that the War on Poverty liked to fund. He made the multi-service center into a big organization, ran for Congress once, registered hundreds of thousands of Puerto Rican voters, became a power in the Puerto Rican Day parade, and led demonstrations that helped induce the city to rebuild a large South Bronx hospital, which has been by far the most significant new source of jobs in the area. He was investigated and audited many times because of government money unaccounted for at his organizations. His aides were rumored to carry weapons and to threaten political rivals with violence. (Velez says this isn't true.) Once Velez and Gigante got into a fistfight after Velez called Gigante a *maricón* ("queer"). (Velez insists that this never happened.)

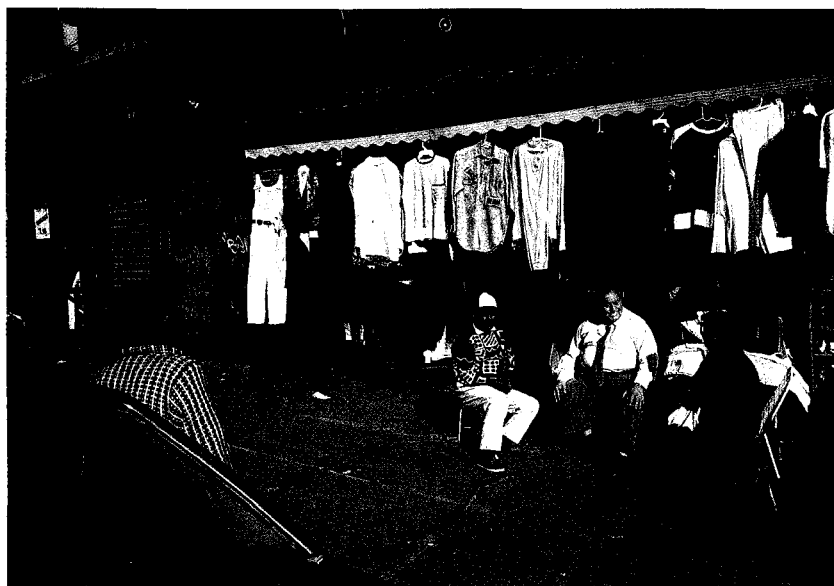
Today Gigante and Velez are both in their late fifties, gray-haired (at least they were until recently, when Velez dyed his hair black), and mellowed. Each professes to have developed a grudging respect for the other. No doubt they will soon be representatives of a certain period in the past—the rough-and-tumble period when the Bronx was just becoming Puerto Rican. Fernando Ferrer,

on the other hand, is part of the first generation of Puerto Ricans born and raised in the Bronx to come to power. He has been groomed for leadership ever since, as a teenager, he joined a program for promising Puerto Rican kids called ASPIRA.

A different group—Dominicans—is now streaming into New York (mainly Washington Heights, in Manhattan, but also the South Bronx) but is too recently arrived to have produced the kind of leaders whose names are widely recognized. A common Dominican route to the United States is to pay a smuggler \$800 or \$1,000 for boat passage from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico, and then to buy a plane ticket from San Juan to New York. Estimates of the number of Dominicans who have moved to New York City in the past decade run between a half million and a million. Dominicans are known for their industriousness, and many of them are illegal aliens ineligible for any kind of social-welfare program; they have gone into the undesirable, illegal, or disorganized end of the labor market, working in sweatshops, driving gypsy cabs, dealing drugs, and operating nightclubs and other perilous small businesses. In New York City, according to Ramon Velez, 6,500 "Puerto Rican Judases" have sold their *bodegas* to Dominicans. Gigante says that many of his tenants are now Dominican. Partly because the Dominican migration is predominantly male and the Puerto Rican family in the South Bronx is predominantly female-headed, Dominican–Puerto Rican marriages and liaisons are becoming common. Surely the Dominican migration is partly responsible for the increased vitality that the South Bronx has begun to display.

I don't mean to make the South Bronx sound happier than it is. Only a block and a half from the Hub, at the corner of 148th Street and Bergen Avenue, is an outdoor drug market, one of many in the area. There is still a great deal of deteriorated housing and vacant land where

housing used to be. I spent a couple of mornings recently at Bronx Venture Corporation, a job-placement and community-development organization in the Hub, talking to Puerto Ricans who had come in to get help finding work. Without exception they wanted to leave the South Bronx. They complained about absent fathers, angry mothers, brothers in jail, sisters on welfare; about ruthless competition with the Dominicans for jobs, shoot-outs between drug dealers, high schools where nobody learns, domestic violence, alcoholism, a constant sense of danger. Something is badly wrong there.



Ramon Velez on Jackson Street, near his Hunts Point Multi-Service Center

Why Is There a Puerto Rican Underclass?



HERE IS NO ONE-FACTOR EXPLANATION of exactly what it is that's wrong. In fact, most of the leading theorists of the underclass could find support for their divergent positions in the Puerto Rican experience.

One theory, which fits well with William Julius Wilson's argument that the underclass was created by the severe contraction of the unskilled-labor market in the big northeastern and midwestern cities, is that Puerto Ricans who moved to the mainland during the peak years of the migration were unlucky in where they went. New York City lost hundreds of thousands of jobs during the 1970s. Particularly unfortunate for Puerto Ricans was the exodus of much of the garment industry to the South. "What I see is a community that came here and put all its eggs in one basket, namely the garment industry and manufacturing," says Angelo Falcón, the president of the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy. When the unskilled jobs in New York began to disappear, Puerto Ricans, who had little education and so were not well prepared to find other kinds of work, began to fall into drugs, street crime, and family dissolution.

The ill effects of unemployment have been exacerbated by the nature of Puerto Rican sex roles and family life. The tradition on the island is one of strong extended-family networks. These deteriorated in New York. "You find the extended family in Puerto Rico and the nuclear family here," says Olga Mendez, a Puerto Rican state senator in New York. The presence of relatives in the home would make it easier for Puerto Rican mothers to work; their absence tends to keep mothers at home, and so does the island ethic that women shouldn't work. In 1980 in New York City, 49 percent of black women and 53 percent of white women were out of the labor force—and 66 percent of Puerto Rican women. Even this low rate of labor-force participation is much higher than the rate for Puerto Rican women on the island. In the United States today the two-income family is a great generator of economic upward mobility, but it is a rare institution among poor Puerto Ricans, whose men are often casualties of the streets, addicted or imprisoned or drifting or dead. Also rare is the female-headed family in which the woman works. "That poverty rates soared for Puerto Rican families while they have declined for black families largely can be traced to the greater success of black women in the labor market," says a 1987 paper by Marta Tienda and Leif Jensen, two of the leading experts on Puerto Ricans.

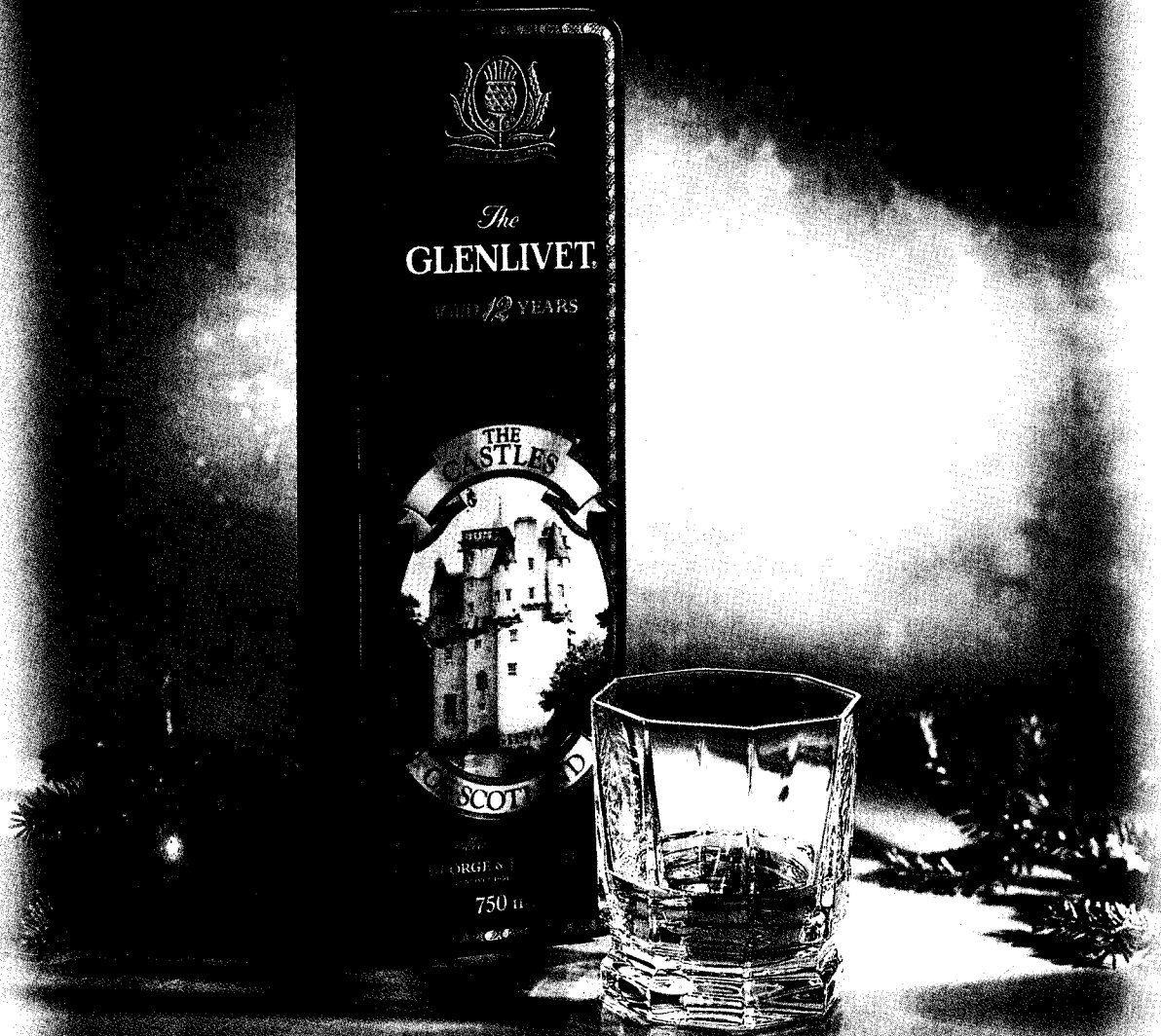
Conservatives who emphasize the role of the welfare system in creating the underclass would say that since other Hispanic groups have labor-force participation rates and family structures markedly different from those of Puerto Ricans, the real issue must be the availability of

government checks, not jobs. Other than Cubans, Puerto Ricans are the only Spanish-speaking ethnic group for whom full U.S. citizenship (and therefore welfare eligibility) in the immigrant generation is the rule rather than the exception. "What should be an advantage for Puerto Ricans—namely, citizenship—has turned into a liability in the welfare state," Linda Chavez writes in *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*. "They have been smothered by entitlements."

In the community of underclass experts the role of pure skin-color prejudice is not much stressed these days, but the case can be made that it has contributed to the woes of poor Puerto Ricans. A staple of Puerto Rican reminiscence, written and oral, is the shock and hurt that dark-skinned Puerto Ricans feel when they come here and experience color prejudice for the first time. Blacks were enslaved on Puerto Rico for centuries—emancipation took place later there than here—but the structure of race relations was different from what it was in the American South. Plantations were relatively unimportant in pre-emancipation Puerto Rico, blacks were always a minority of the island's population, and there was a much higher proportion of free blacks than in the United States. Puerto Rico never developed the kind of rigid racial caste system that characterized places with plantation economies and black majorities. Intermarriage was common, and there was no bright legal and social line between those having African blood and whites. (The U.S. Census Bureau no longer asks Puerto Ricans to identify themselves by race.) In Puerto Rico the prosperous classes tend to be lighter-skinned, but dark-skinned people who acquire money don't find the same difficulty in being accepted in neighborhoods and social clubs that they do here.

On the mainland racial prejudice may play a role in shutting Puerto Ricans out of jobs, in ensuring that they live in ghettos, and in instilling an internalized, defeatist version of the wider society's racial judgments. But what's striking about the racial consciousness of Puerto Ricans as against that of African-Americans is the much lower quotient of anger at society. The whole question of who is at fault for the widespread poverty—the poor people or the United States—seems to preoccupy people much less when the subject is Puerto Ricans. For example, conservatives now commonly attribute the persistent poverty of the black underclass to the "victim mentality" expressed by black professors and leadership organizations. I think that the victim mentality among blacks is much more a part of the life of the upper-middle class than of the poor. But even if we grant the premise that ethnic groups are ideologically monolithic, the Puerto Rican case would indicate that the victim mentality doesn't have anything to do with persistent poverty: the Puerto Rican leadership does not have a victim mentality, but persistent poverty is much more severe among Puerto Ricans than among blacks. The National Puerto Rican Coalition publishes first-rate studies about Puerto

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Rican poverty that take different sides on the question of whether or not it's completely society's fault—something it's difficult to imagine of the NAACP.

Va y Ven



FINAL THEORY ABOUT WHY PUERTO Ricans are so poor as a group has to do with migration patterns. During the peak years of migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland, the people who migrated were apparently worse off than the people who didn't. A paper by Vilma Ortiz, of the Educational Testing Service, cites figures showing that in 1960 a group of recent Puerto Rican immigrants had a lower percentage of high school and college graduates than a control group on the island. Ortiz's view that it was not a migration of the most ambitious and capable—that people with less education and lower-status occupations were likelier to move—fits with the idea that for Muñoz emigration was a way to reduce the crush of destitute former peasants on the island. Since about 1970, most experts believe, the pattern has been changing and better-educated Puerto Ricans have become more likely to leave the island, because of a shortage of middle-class jobs there. Oscar Lewis wrote in *La Vida*, his 1965 book about Puerto Rican poverty, "The majority of migrants in the New York sample had made a three-step migration—from a rural birthplace in Puerto Rico to a San Juan slum to New York." (Lewis did a lifetime of work on Latin American poverty which contains a great deal of interesting material, but he is rarely quoted anymore; his reputation is in total eclipse in academic circles because he invented the phrase "culture of poverty," which is now seen as a form of blaming the victim.)

Social critics commonly complain that Puerto Ricans lack a true immigrant mentality—that they aren't fully committed to making it on the mainland, so they don't put down deep neighborhood and associational roots, as other immigrants do, and they are constantly moving back and forth from Puerto Rico. Glazer and Moynihan wrote,

In 1958-1959, 10,600 children were transferred from Puerto Rican schools, and 6,500 were released to go to school in Puerto Rico. . . . Something new perhaps has been added to the New York scene—an ethnic group that will not assimilate to the same degree as others do. . . .

This is known as the *va y ven* syndrome; those who dispute its existence

say that the heavy air traffic back and forth between New York and San Juan is evidence that Puerto Ricans visit their relatives a lot, not that they relocate constantly. "Where's your data [about constant relocation]?" Clara Rodriguez, a sociologist at Fordham University, asks. "There's nothing but travel data."

The migration patterns of middle-class, as well as poor, Puerto Ricans have become an issue in recent years. As has been the case with other ethnic groups, the well-educated and employed Puerto Ricans leave the slums. For Puerto Ricans who came to New York during the 1940s and 1950s—in slang, "Nuyoricans"—the most common sequence of moves was from the island to East Harlem to the South Bronx to Soundview, a blue-collar neighborhood just across the Bronx River from Hunt's Point, and then to the middle-class North Bronx, Queens, New Jersey, or Connecticut.

The consequent isolation of the Puerto Rican poor seems to be even more pronounced than the isolation of the black poor. Churches in black ghettos are all-black institutions often dominated by middle-class blacks; the major churches in the South Bronx are Catholic and aren't run by Puerto Ricans. The work force of the New York City government is a third black and only a tenth Puerto Rican, meaning that middle-class blacks are much more likely than middle-class Puerto Ricans to return to the slums during the workday to perform professional social-service functions. The most common form of upward mobility in the South Bronx is supposed to be military service (South Bronx soldiers were often in the news during the Gulf War), but that makes people more successful by taking them thousands of miles away from the neighborhood.

The leaders of the South Bronx often don't live there. Ramon Velez has a residence in the Bronx but also ones in Manhattan and Puerto Rico; Ferrer and Badillo live in more prosperous sections of the Bronx; Robert Garcia,



A suburban-style housing project on Charlotte Street, in the South Bronx

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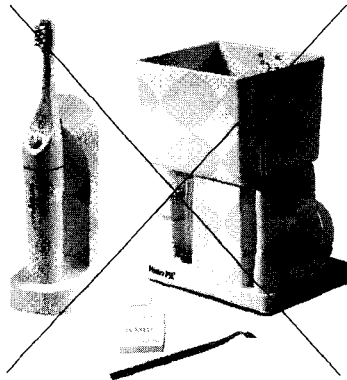
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In an unreconstructed neighborhood children are walked home from school

Badillo's much-loved successor in Congress, who resigned in a scandal, owned a house north of the New York City suburbs during the time he was in Congress; Yolanda Rivera, who as the head of Banana Kelly is one of the most promising young community leaders in the South Bronx, keeps a house in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. The Reverend Earl Kooperkamp, an Episcopal minister who was recently transferred to a South Bronx church after tours of duty in several poor black neighborhoods in New York City, says, "Anybody who was living here before and making anything got the hell out. In Harlem, East New York, Bushwick, Bedford Stuyvesant, you had the occasional professional. There are no lawyers and doctors in this community."

When middle-class blacks move out of black ghettos, they usually relocate to more prosperous black neighborhoods, which form a nonblighted locus of the ethnic culture. Puerto Ricans who leave the South Bronx for other parts of the New York area tend to melt into more integrated neighborhoods, where it's much harder to maintain the fierce concern with "the race" that has historically existed in the black middle class. Ramón Daubón, of the National Puerto Rican Coalition, goes so far as to say, "There is no distinctive middle-class Puerto Rican neighborhood in the United States."

There *is* a Levittown for Puerto Ricans who are pursuing the standard dream of escape to suburban comfort—just outside San Juan. "If a Puerto Rican makes fifty or sixty thousand a year here, he wants to move back," says Ramon Velez. "He wants to buy land, build a house." Black middle-class emigrants from ghettos tend to remain in the same metropolitan area. Middle-class Puerto Ricans who move back to Puerto Rico can hardly function as role models, political leaders, counselors, or enlargers of the economic pie for the people in the South Bronx. "Look around in Puerto Rico," Velez says. "The legislature, all the influential people—they're all from

New York. Two of my former employees are in the state senate. Those who are able to achieve something here and make money, they go back."

When young middle-class Puerto Ricans leave the island for the mainland because they can't find work as doctors or engineers at home, they often gravitate not to New York but to Sun Belt destinations like Orlando and Houston. The Puerto Rican population of Florida rose by 160 percent in the 1980s. New York now has a reputation on the island as the place that poor people move to, and later leave if they make any money. The percentage of mainland Puerto Ricans who

live in New York has dropped steadily over the years, and if you exclude Nuyoricans from the social and economic statistics, Puerto Ricans look much less like an underclass.

Douglas Gurak and Luis Falcón, in a 1990 paper on Puerto Rican migration patterns, argue that poverty, non-participation in the labor force, and unstable marriages were often characteristic of the Puerto Ricans who are now poor here, rather than resulting from the economic and social conditions of New York. They write,

It is clear that the selectivity of the migration process . . . results in an overrepresentation of women in the New York region who are characterized by traits associated with poverty. Those with less labor force experience, less education, more children, and more marital instability are the ones most likely to migrate to the mainland. Those with more stable unions, fewer children and more education are more likely to return to the island.

In Puerto Rico, especially rural Puerto Rico, common-law marriage and out-of-wedlock childbearing are long-established customs. Before Muñoz's modernization efforts brought the rates down, a quarter of all marriages on the island were consensual, and one-third of all births were out of wedlock. (Muñoz himself had two daughters out of wedlock, and married their mother only when he was about to assume the governorship of Puerto Rico.) Female immigrants to New York, Gurak and Falcón say, tend to come out of this tradition, and they are more likely than those who don't emigrate to have recently gone through the breakup of a marriage or a serious relationship. Other Hispanic emigrants, such as Dominicans and Colombians, tend to rank higher than non-emigrants on "human capital" measures like education, family structure, and work history; and Puerto Rican immigrants who settle outside New York aren't generally more disadvantaged than people who remain in Puerto Rico. The

overall picture is one of entrenched Puerto Rican poverty becoming increasingly a problem in New York City rather than nationwide.

Although their explanations vary, experts on Puerto Rican poverty tend to agree on how to ameliorate it: both Marta Tienda and Douglas Gurak, for example, call for special educational and job-training efforts. There is something about black-white race relations in America that leads people in all camps to dismiss those kinds of anti-poverty efforts in behalf of blacks as unimaginative, old-fashioned, vague, unworkable, or doomed to failure. The self-defeating view that the problem is so severe that it could be solved only through some step too radical for the political system ever to take seems to evaporate when the subject is Puerto Ricans rather than blacks.

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I'm fit now to love those
who offer no future when future
is the heart's way of throwing itself away
in time. He gave me all, even
the last marbled instant, and not as excess,
but as if a closed intention were itself
a spring by the roadside
I could put my lips to and be quenched
remembering. So love in a room now
can too easily make me lost
like a child having to hurry home
in darkness, afraid the house
will be empty. Or just afraid.

Tell me again how this is only
for as long as it lasts. I want to be
fragile and true as one who extends
the moment with its death intact,
with her too wise heart
cleansed of that debris we called hope.
Only then can I revisit that last surviving
and know with the wild exactness
of a shattered window what he meant
with all time gone
when he said, "I love you."

Now offer me again
what you thought was nothing.

—Tess Gallagher

The Status Question



IT MAY BE THAT THE REASON FOR THE relatively calm and undramatic quality of discussions of Puerto Rican poverty is that the whole issue is really only a side-show. The consuming policy matter for Puerto Ricans, including mainland Puerto Ricans, is what's known as the status question: the issue of whether Puerto Rico should become a state, become independent, or remain a commonwealth. "It affects our psyche, our opportunity, our identity, our families," says Jorge Batista, a Puerto Rican lawyer who is a former deputy borough president of the Bronx. "The only analogy for you is the Civil War. It permeates all our lives."

Puerto Rico occupies an unusual economic middle ground—worse off than the United States, better off than most of the rest of Latin America. Progress is now coming much more slowly than it did in the Muñoz years. Muñoz retired in 1964, after handpicking his successor. During the next four years, however, Muñoz's commonwealth party split into factions, and in 1968 Luis Ferré, the head of the archrival statehood party, won the governorship. Muñoz, then in retirement in Spain but still a god in Puerto Rico, handpicked another successor, Rafael Hernández Colón. Hernández unseated Ferré in the 1972 election, and the statehood party passed into the hands of Carlos Romero Barceló. The next few gubernatorial elections pitted Hernández against Romero: Romero won in 1976 and 1980, and Hernández won in 1984, and was re-elected against a different opponent in 1988.

The essential features of commonwealth are federal-income-tax exemption, only partial participation in the U.S. welfare system, and a lack of voting representation in Congress. Psychically, commonwealth status implies a certain distance from the United States—a commitment to the preservation of the Spanish language and of Puerto Rican culture. Like other liberal parties of long standing around the world, the commonwealth party is perceived as both the party of the establishment—of the way things are done in Puerto Rico—and the party of the common man. The party's symbol is the *jibaro*, the agrarian peasant from the mountains, the closest thing there is to an emblematic national figure. The typical Puerto Rican is no longer a *jibaro*, but that doesn't matter—the typical Texan is no longer a pickup-driving country boy named Bubba, either. Puerto Rico's idea of itself is as an island of earthy, unpretentious, good-hearted people who treat each other with *dulce cariño*, "sweet caring." It's easy to see how American culture could be perceived as a threat to this ethos, and thus something that should be kept at arm's length.

The statehood party is prepared to take the plunge into American life, although it promises, by way of soothing people's fears, to establish an *estatidad jibara*. Politi-

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cally, the statehood party is to the right of the commonwealth party (and far to the right of the small, left-wing independence party) on the classic Latin American issue of whether or not to view the United States as a benign force in the hemisphere.

In terms of what would actually happen under statehood, though, the party, conservative though it may be, would bring into being a conservative counter-utopia. As a state, Puerto Rico would have two U.S. senators and five or six congressmen, all of whom might well be Democrats. And if Puerto Rico became a state, Republicans would find it more difficult to maintain their opposition to making the District of Columbia, even more solidly Democratic, a state too. Taxes on the island might rise significantly, because Section 936 of the Internal Revenue Code, the big Puerto Rican tax break, would be abolished; businesses would presumably relocate elsewhere. Puerto Rico is now given parts of the U.S. social-welfare benefits package, and 1.4 million people, nearly half the island's population, receive food assistance. Statehood would bring full benefits and the welfare rolls of the new state might swell tremendously, not just with islanders but possibly also with mainland Puerto Ricans who would move back. A bitter controversy could be expected to emerge over whether to make English the island's official language.

Robert L. Bartley, the editorial-page editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, who in conservative battles can usually be relied on to side with the ideologues against the pragmatists, recently concluded after a visit to Puerto Rico that "what the statehood issue really needs is a good vacation." Advocates of statehood—a mixture of business interests and the rising lower and middle classes, like Margaret Thatcher's coalition in Britain—acknowledge that it would be worse in the short term, and stress the overriding historical importance of the island's becoming fully American.

The last time the status question was put to a vote in Puerto Rico was in 1967; commonwealth won. There the matter rested until 1989, when Governor Hernández, at his inauguration, issued a surprise call for resolution of the status question—and then, even more surprising, President Bush announced that he favors Puerto Rican statehood in his first address to Congress. Bush's Puerto Rico policy is usually explained as an example of his tendency to make decisions more on the basis of personal loyalty than of political analysis. Luis Ferré, the first statehood-party governor, now an eighty-seven-year-old patriarch, is an old friend of Bush's, and endorsed him for President in 1980. Soon after the 1988 election Don Luis came to Washington and stayed as a guest in the Bush home. There, the rumor goes, Bush asked him what he

wanted as his reward now that the long crusade for the White House was over, and Ferré said, "Before I die, I would like to hear a President of the United States say before a joint session of Congress that he wants statehood for Puerto Rico."

Bush's remarks in favor of statehood set off a two-year process in Congress to arrange another plebiscite in Puerto Rico. It was supposed to take place this year, but negotiations fell apart over such issues as whether the results would be binding on Congress and whether mainland Puerto Ricans would be allowed to vote. Now the plebiscite is sure to be put off until a year or two after the 1992 election. In the meantime, the commonwealth party's dream is that the U.S. Congress will allow it to be represented on the ballot by an option called "enhanced commonwealth," which would give Puerto Rico greater political autonomy, including the right to negotiate with foreign governments; even if this happens, it is not a foregone conclusion that the commonwealth option will win the plebiscite.

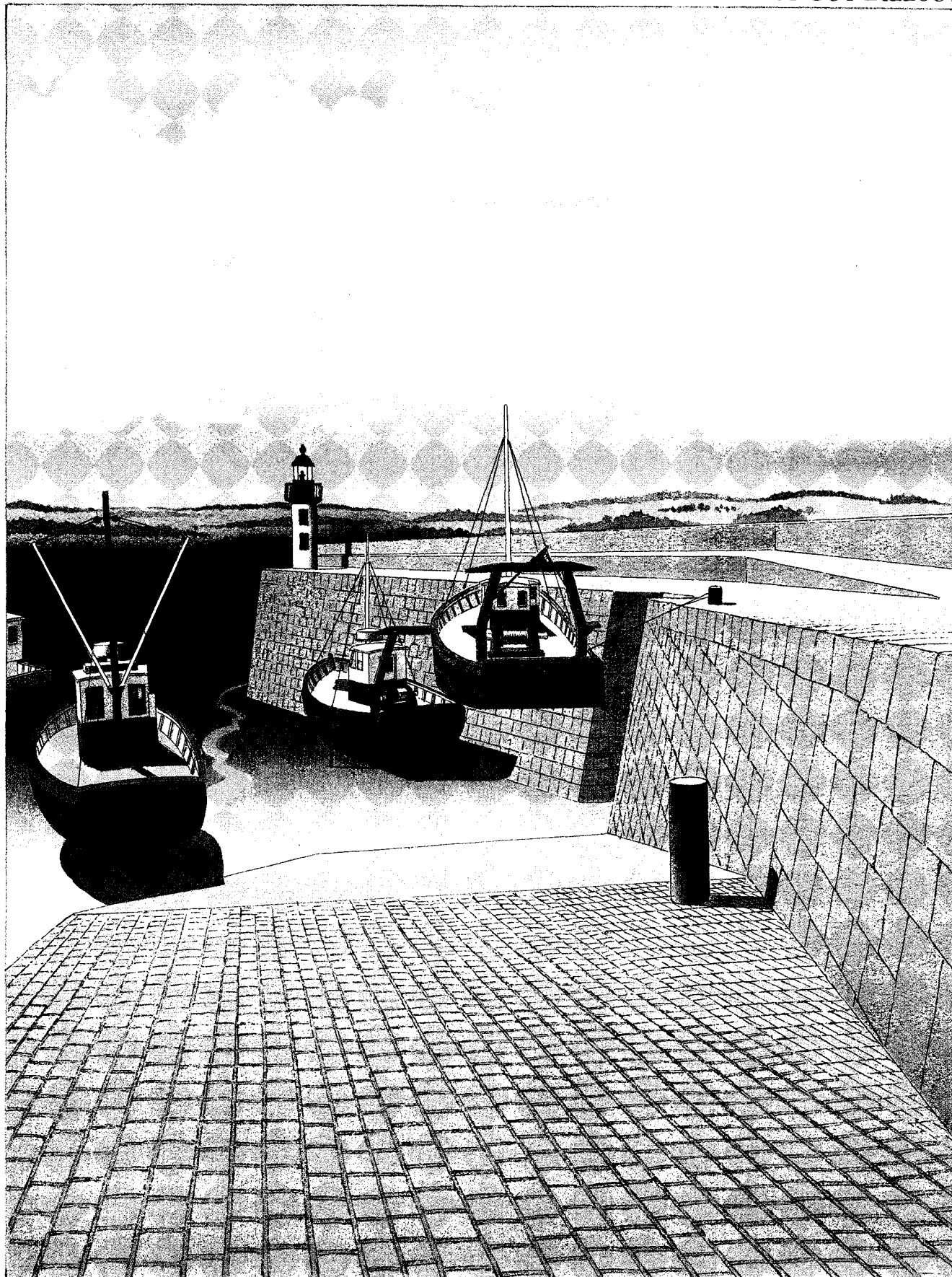
Every possible outcome of the status question would have some effect on Puerto Rican poverty on the mainland. In the almost completely unlikely event of independence, the new Puerto Rican nation would be unable to offer anything like the current level of food-stamp benefits, and presumably there would be another mass emigration of the poor to the United States, motivated by fear of privation; when independence took effect, islanders would lose the right of free immigration to the mainland that they now have as U.S. citizens. Statehood would raise food assistance and other benefits on the island to their mainland levels, and so would engender some migration of the poor from the mainland to the island, thus making the problem of Puerto Rican poverty less severe in New York and other big eastern cities.

Enhanced commonwealth is the only one of the three status options that holds any real promise of spurring economic development on the island in the near future. Even a muted reprise of Muñoz's economic miracle could surely be expected to help alleviate Puerto Rican poverty in New York, by drawing people back to the island to find the unskilled jobs that they can no longer find on the mainland.

Obviously, a great deal could be done on the mainland to reduce Puerto Rican poverty. That it can even be discussed as an island problem, susceptible to island solutions, may be the most important of all the differences between the situations of Puerto Ricans and blacks. For many blacks there is, psychologically, a homeland off-stage, in the South or in Africa, but nobody can really think of it as a place where the wrenching difficulties of the present might be worked out. □

LOW TIDE

BY GUY BILLOUT





Revolutionary Strains

The Metropolitan Opera is giving the brilliant Ghosts of Versailles a royal sendoff

by Matthew Gurewitsch

AMONG NEW YORK'S composers, poets, and playwrights, their friends and friends of friends, word has been circulating since last winter of the power and brilliance of the new opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*, John Corigliano's first. The general public has yet to hear it. The world premiere, at the Metropolitan Opera, is not until December 19. Still, the buzz is based on firsthand knowledge, thanks to a remarkable tape. Featuring unidentified young singers accompanied by Corigliano's own synthesized rendition of the orchestral parts, the tape was made as a rehearsal aid for the musicians and the star-studded cast announced for the premiere.

If New York were London, the tape would no doubt have been played pub-

licly at lectures or discussions by now. Not here. Why the Met has forbidden the tape to be played even for the worthy purposes of education is anybody's guess. Maybe the management wishes to preserve for the premiere the gloss of the new—even though an informed public is likely to be a more receptive and thus a more responsive one.

Contrary to much uninformed opinion, writing operas is not a lost art, though perhaps it might as well be. For every *Nixon in China*, applauded from Los Angeles to Helsinki, there are dozens, maybe hundreds, of new operatic scores that are never staged or staged only once. And in general, the grander the institution, the less it cares to gamble on the work of living creators. Adventure consists of eccentric produc-

tions of standard repertoire, or an occasional excursion into the second-tier works of the masters or the masterpieces of the also-rans. No house illustrates this more perfectly than the Met, which in its first season at Lincoln Center, a quarter century ago, offered two world premieres (Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Marvin David Levy's *Mourning Becomes Electra*) and until this season not one more.

All of which makes the circumstances surrounding *The Ghosts of Versailles* so extraordinary and unlikely. James Levine, at the time the music director of the Met and now its artistic director, first broached the subject of an opera to Corigliano when they met to discuss something else. The composer, now fifty-three, was then in his

early forties. After years of supporting himself by teaching and writing arrangements and programming radio shows, he was starting to make his name with audiences and critics, especially for two brilliant concerti, one for oboe and the other for clarinet. Crafted with equal parts mastery and flair, full of striking dramatic gestures and alluring melody, they were, as Corigliano's own phrase went, "unfashionably Romantic"—and a public long sick of the tuneless cerebations then in academic favor greeted Corigliano's efforts with enthusiasm. The concerti received standing ovations, even from the blue-haired matinee crowd. Without prompting, audiences understood Corigliano, and that was as he wanted it to be. If other composers think that the onus is on the listeners to understand new music, Corigliano has said, let the composers pay *them*. There is nothing simpleminded about what he writes, but he wears accessibility like a badge. The megalomaniacal nineteenth-century image of the composer as a lonely titan is not his. He prefers to think of a composer in the eighteenth-century way: as a craftsman (this went even for Mozart) with a job to do.

So Corigliano was very pleased when, after the success of the concerti, Renata Scotto, the Met's diva of the hour, had the happy notion of having him write a "concerto" for her—a dramatic solo that she could sing with orchestras all over the world. He suggested adapting, in Latin, the great monologues of Seneca's *Medea*; this was to her liking, and she arranged for the composer to get together with Levine for further discussion. Over lunch the maestro wanted to know whether Corigliano had ever thought of writing an opera.

In fact, he had. For years he had been saying he wanted to write a comedy, an opera buffa; but as he had also been saying for years, "nobody wants a buffa." Right away he told Levine that he wanted to write something based on the third of Beaumarchais's Figaro plays, *La Mère coupable* (*The Guilty Mother*), the sequel to the playwright's better-known *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*. But though he had thought hard about these things, Corigliano was by no means itching to go any further. "I have a lot of problems with opera," he says. "The conventions bother me." Recitative—lightly accom-

panied song approximating the pitches and rhythms of speech—strikes him as "silly." Actual speech in an opera strikes him as "strange." Arioso—a sort of heightened speech pushing toward the frank effusion of song—strikes him as "boring." Listening to the longueurs of Wagner, he wishes he could hit a fast-forward button. The mature operas of Mozart contain more beautiful music in one evening than he feels he can stand. Realism troubles him. (He finds it awkward to have a character sing "Pass the salt.") "But the artifice of buffa," he said, with the experience of *The Ghosts of Versailles* behind him, "makes it possible to do stuff in an unrealistic way."

In any case, when he said his piece to Levine over lunch, Levine was about as receptive to the notion of an opera buffa as everyone else. "Buffas," Levine told Corigliano, "don't work in our house." "That is because they weren't written for big houses," Corigliano replied. "This intrigued him," Corigliano told me. "I said I'd like to bring the great characters of opera buffa back to life. I'd like to honor the past as well as the future."

An offer was in the air. Aaron Copland, who had a tale to tell about his own *The Tender Land*, told Corigliano to resist. The younger man recalls, "An opera is four or five years of your life, Aaron told me—and in my case make that seven or eight—followed by four performances, and you'll never see it again." But when the call came, Corigliano said yes. "It was the Metropolitan Opera," he says. "How often do you get such a chance?"

The opera was commissioned (reportedly at a fee of \$150,000) for presentation during the company's centennial festivities, in 1983. By the time it reached completion, in March of 1987, its fate looked grim. Bruce Crawford, the general manager, had stated publicly that the Met's audience had no interest in contemporary opera, that the Met's mission was to preserve the tried and true. As seasons dragged on, many despaired of ever hearing *A Figaro for Antonia*, as the work was then called, and no reassurances were forthcoming from the Met. But given the reactionary climate and the cumbersome realities of operatic planning in a top international house (where key artists are booked five or more years in advance), the wonder now is not how



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**THE BUTTERFLY
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by Charles C. Mann and
Mark L. Plummer

Grounded in the Noah Principle—the view that all living things have a right to exist—the Endangered Species Act of 1973 insisted that we attempt to save every endangered species. This inflexibility, the authors say, has become economically untenable.



NO RADIO

by Edward Zuckerman

A car is broken into every thirty seconds in New York City, the author calculates; in most cases the radio is stolen. A look at where all those stolen radios go, and at creative approaches to forestalling such theft.



**THE PEOPLE WE
MARRY**

by Tim O'Brien

"For many days he received no letters at all, not even a postcard, and the war kept squeezing in on him. The notion of the finite took hold and would not let go." A short story.

slowly the Met has moved to mount Corigliano's fantastically ambitious, prodigiously accomplished magnum opus but how fast.

THE GHOSTS OF VERSAILLES, as it is now called, bears the designation "A Grand Opera Buffa in Two Acts." But grand opera is one genre, opera buffa another—as distinct as costume drama and farce. The "Grand" part suggests pomp and circumstance, historical frescoes, picturesque locales, imperial themes, a prodigal calling into play of musicianship, stagecraft, and glamour, as in the heady days when Meyerbeer ruled the Paris Opéra. "Buffa," or "comic," conjures up Donizetti and Rossini in their populist vein: catchy tunes, frothy plots, nimble entertainment mounted with slender means. Binding grandeur to the buffoonish with a melancholy ribbon of romance beyond the grave, Corigliano has in effect created his own genre. Within it a profusion of arias, duets, and ensembles that ought to be bewildering in their variety find logical and affecting order.

As everyone knows, *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro* made the transition to the lyric stage some time ago, with a certain success. But Corigliano had no intention of mimicking the triumphs of Rossini and Mozart. A neo-classical pastiche of the sort Stravinsky managed with such eerie elegance in *The Rake's Progress* (1951) was not what he had in mind. Not that *La Mère coupable* would have lent itself to such treatment. Whereas in Beaumarchais's earlier plays a youthful, rebellious spirit of freedom (in the person of Figaro, the author's fictionalized self-portrait) triumphs over the forces of privilege and repression, the tone here is disabused and bitter. A possibility left open in *Le Mariage de Figaro* has come to pass: the virtuous Countess Almaviva has broken her marriage vow. She has borne a daughter not her husband's. (The Count, for his part, has fathered a son not his wife's, but that is another story. This is not *Le Père coupable*.)

Even if a consistent style might have been found or invented to suit Beaumarchais's drama, Corigliano wanted numbers in many styles, with plenty of variety and breaks for applause. At the same time, this wish put him on his guard. "Mindless eclecticism bothers me," he says. "The freedom is danger-

ous. It's not enough to say, 'I wrote this because I felt like it.' You get a pot-pourri of styles without a meaning. I need something to motivate the styles so they don't seem arbitrary. Until I build the structure, I don't know what I need. The choices should be 'inevitable but not predictable,' as was said of Beethoven. Before I write any music for a new piece, I architect it."

As his librettist Corigliano chose William M. Hoffman, a playwright, poet, and longtime friend. Hoffman's first attempt, a straightforward operatic adaption of *La Mère coupable*, was rejected. All Corigliano could have made of it, he says dismissively, would have been "something 'neo.'" It took two years of intense collaboration to put the basic architecture in place. The composer was guided throughout by convictions he is prepared to state as facts.

"We discussed the fact that I wanted to write a true *opera*—not a musical comedy. The difference? In musical comedy the impetus comes from the words and the plot. The music serves those. In opera, music sets up the premise that gets solved by the words and the plot." (Would Mozart, Verdi, or Wagner ever have signed such a statement? It is safe to say not. They took subjects they liked and set them to music. So did Puccini and Bizet.) "What I needed was a world of flux that I would move into and out of at will. I didn't want to be locked in."

The practical solution that Hoffman devised for Corigliano was a most ingenious nest of Chinese boxes. The outermost box, set in a shadowy present, is Marie Antoinette's private theater in the Petit Trianon, where the ghosts of Louis XVI and his court, with Beaumarchais among the throng, have been hanging around for two hundred dreary years. All this time Beaumarchais has been trying in vain to win the love of the languid and complaining queen. Tonight, in a fresh attempt to please her, he proposes to present an opera, *A Figaro for Antonia*.

This opera-within-the-opera is the second box. It is cast with the characters of *La Mère coupable*, from which it borrows the central intrigue: the attempt on the part of Count Almaviva's false friend Bégears to bankrupt the Count and marry his ward (in truth, the Count's daughter). Within *A Figaro for Antonia* a new plot, devised by Hoffman, is uppermost: Beaumarchais's



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ERIC FONER &
JOHN A. GARRATY
Editors

scheme to change the course of history. He promises, with the help of Figaro and the rest, to rescue the queen from the guillotine and escape with her to Philadelphia. And to do so, he borrows the queen's diamond necklace. But by some unaccountable theatrical magic, the presence of the necklace turns Beaumarchais's plans awry, bringing the third box into being. Figaro revolts. He decides that rather than sell the necklace to raise money for the imprisoned queen, he will pocket the proceeds to save the Almaviva household.

In this extremity, flouted by his creature, Beaumarchais crosses the footlights. *A Figaro for Antonia* ceases to exist. The onstage audience vanishes. Now everything is "real." Lives are at stake. To bring Figaro around, Beaumarchais shows him—transcribed from actual court records (and this might be regarded as a fourth box)—the harrowing trial of the Queen of France. Figaro, appalled, risks all to set her free. But on the threshold of her cell she accepts her destiny. The villain Bégearss is unmasked in the nick of time, the comic characters lift off by balloon, and the ghost of Marie Antoinette, her crushed heart touched, joins the ghost of Beaumarchais for eternity in an artifice of his own making.

SO THIS IS what Corigliano means by architecture. With its trapdoors and trick perspectives, the blueprint of the *Ghosts of Versailles* libretto might have been laid out by M. C. Escher. Before working the ghost world out in music, Corigliano visualized and actually drew it in colors he calls "timbre hues." He likes to observe that ghosts have "no period, no style." Their music is accordingly amorphous, marked at times by drifting dissonance, at others by hard, hammering rhythms that verge on the soulless. Yet the music is also capable, in the arias for Marie Antoinette and Beaumarchais, of yearning tenderness. For a lyric interlude of the comedy Corigliano visualized "clouds of Mozart," and it is to Mozart and Rossini that the comic characters trace their lineage, though they are also plainly our contemporaries. The declamatory outbreaks for the villain owe a debt to Schubert, perhaps to Beethoven, perhaps to late Verdi. None of these choices is arbitrary in the least.

Hoffman's references to historical

fact are as numerous as they are ingenious. Beaumarchais may or may not have lusted for the queen, but his biography shows his fascination with all things monarchical. Nor is his bent for opera an invention: though *Le Barbier de Séville* received its premiere at the Comédie Française as a straight play, it was in fact written as a libretto. (In *Citizens*, the recent best-selling history of the French Revolution, Simon Schama notes that Beaumarchais was also in his time "magistrate and prisoner, courtier and rebel, diplomat and spy, businessman and bankrupt, publisher and publicist, insider and outsider.") Marie Antoinette, for her part, was indeed a devoted theatrical amateur. Her private theater exists (it can be seen on a tour of the Petit Trianon); she badgered the King into permitting a performance of the subversive *Mariage de Figaro*, and the last role she played was *Le Barbier de Séville*'s minx heroine Rosine. Hoffman imagines her "wearing a simple white dress and straw hat"—her age's equivalent, in his view, of blue jeans. (The repercussions of her revolutionary, democratic habit of dressing down are felt to the present day.) As for the necklace, look up "Diamond Necklace Affair" in Schama's index to see how just such a piece of jewelry was employed to rile public sentiment against the (in this instance) blameless sovereign.

Literary allusions abound as well. The very first words heard in the opera, a song about a lovesick cavalier, quote the page Chérubin in *Le Mariage de Figaro*. Some lyrics tossed off by the page's love child Léon are a translation of lines Lorenzo da Ponte wrote for Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. A footnote in the libretto informs us that Bégearss's first aria, a tirade on the worm as the king of beasts, is suggested by a passage in the allegorical poem *Il re orso* (*The Bear King*), by Arrigo Boito, the masterly librettist for Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*. (Bégearss's second aria, in which he incites the bloodthirsty revolutionary women of Paris against the aristocracy, is based on images of Jews as vermin from the Nazi propaganda film *Der ewige Jude*.) The absurdist lyrics for the Egyptian diva, Samira, whose appearance spices up the first-act finale, are proverbs strung together from a phrase book of colloquial Arabic.

Hoffman, whose most famous work

to date is *As Is*, the trailblazing play of the AIDS era, does not hesitate to admit that he loves research (he has a bookcase of books on Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette, and the French Revolution to prove it). Trained in the classics, he takes his place gladly within the great tradition. The allusions are there to delight those who catch them. But he does not believe that one's appreciation of the whole needs to depend on them. If he is right, and I believe he is, the glory belongs to Corigliano, who has fused the libretto's motley materials in his hallucinatory arcs of music. A famous phrase of Wagner's, coined for his own genre-exploding creations, comes to mind: "deeds of music made visible."

And what is it that music—supreme in this among the arts—is then empowered to make visible? Intimations of the everlasting; the fact of evanescence. "Time changes all," sings Hoffman and Corigliano's Countess, and then embarks on the duet that brings the opera-within-the-opera to its extraordinary close, somber and serene:

*As summer brings a wistful breeze,
Cooling houses, blowing trees,
Women dream their bridal days.
As autumn brings a windy chill
And water freezes on the hill,
Women love and hate their men,
Wishing they were young again.
O time, o time, o thieving time,
Give me back my stolen years.
As winter brings a longer night,
And women read by candlelight,
They come to know, like sun, like rain,
Nothing lasts, not love or pain.
O time, o time, o thieving time,
Give me back my stolen years.*

Thence follows the plunge into history—the suspense and cruelties of the French Revolution. How can such things be? How can the world forget? Threading through the music is an answer.

"FOUR performances, and you'll never see it again": such was Copland's gloomy prophecy. But Corigliano has a way of confounding the odds. Besides the oboe and clarinet concerti, his *Pied Piper Fantasy* (for James Galway) and his *Symphony No. 1* (written for the Chicago Symphony since the completion of the opera) have been reaching wide audiences in live performance and on records. Famous in the profession for

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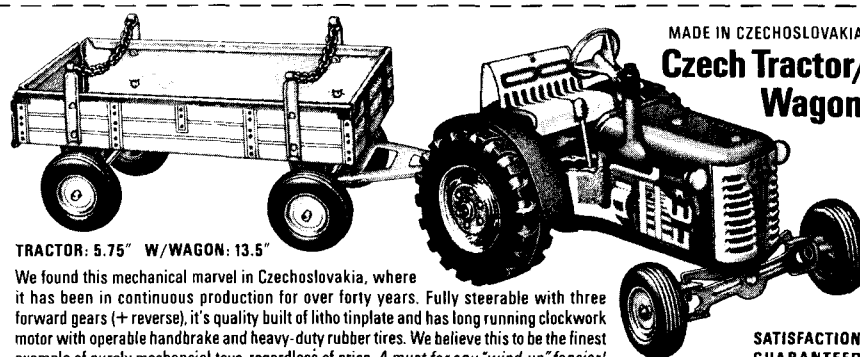
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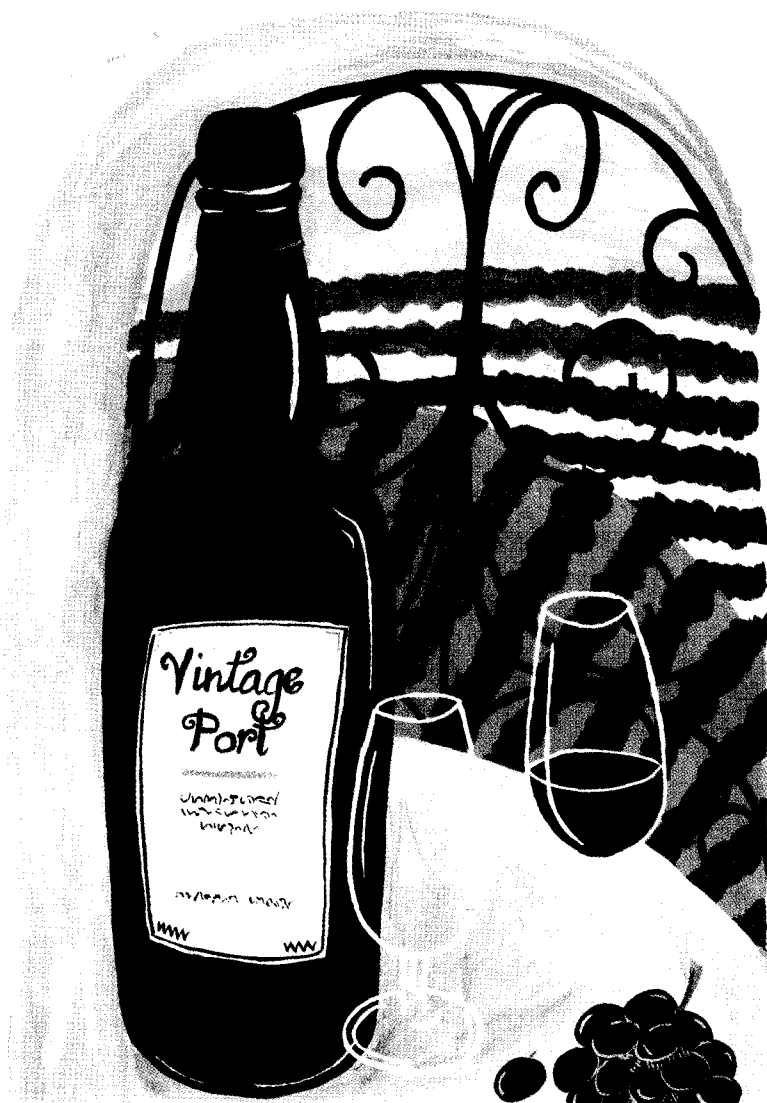
Across 1. PA(LAD)IN 2. K-A-RATE 3. G-LANCE 4. QU(I-X)OTE 5. HOSTAG-E (anag. + e)
6. REI(g)NED 7. MEDALS (anag.) 8. HOMAGES (anag.) 9. MAR(CH)ES 10. A(FRES)H
(rev.) 11. MAR(SH)Y 12. D(ul)Y-NASTY *Knight's Moves* AL. PAGE-AN-TRY AN. LEA(THE)R-
Y AP. DEPOSIT (anag.) AR. N-O-O-K BP. J(O)UST BR. FILES (double def.) BS. T-RAIN
CP. CATHEDRA (hidden) DL. T(H)ANKS DO. PINCH (hidden) DX. K-NEE(L)S (*seen*
rev.) EQ. G(H)AN-A (*a nag* rev.) ES. ROO(k)-F EX. DU(P)ES (anag. + p) FW. NEAR
(hidden) FX. DRAY (rev.) GL. M(I-LIT)ARY (*army* anag.) GT. M(I-GR)ATE GV. GE-AR
IN. RAM-PART IW. SIR LANCELOT (anag.) JN. PHALANXES (anag.) JS. T-ART JT. BLEED
(hidden) KO. SOLD(I)ER KR. DU(NGE)ON (*gone* anag.)

his incapacitating pre-performance anxiety, the composer points out that the stakes are higher in opera. If a symphonic piece doesn't make it here, someone else can always try it again opposite Tchaikovsky somewhere else. The players are on salary. But building a show costs a fortune. New operas seldom get a second chance.

The Met, having brought *The Ghosts of Versailles* into being by its commission, is giving it a royal sendoff. The soprano Teresa Stratas, a searing artist, has been announced as Marie Antoinette (but she is a great canceler); the baritone Håkan Hagegård, manly and poetic, is Beaumarchais; Gino Quilico, another baritone, who shines as Rossini's Figaro, is sure to do so as Corigliano's; and Marilyn Horne will appear in a wild cameo as the Egyptian diva. (Being a practical man, the composer took no foolish risks on tenors. The only major character in that range is Bégearss, the villain, whose tones need melt no hearts. The part has gone to Graham Clark, a skillful declaimer blessed with power and cunning.)

The production, too, promises to be of festival caliber. The designer is John Conklin, whose eye for shape and color is matched by a delight in the mysteries of stage machinery. If his production models do not lie, this production will be the most bewitching piece of theater the Met has seen since David Hockney delighted the opera and art crowds with his famous French triple bill ten years ago. The director is Colin Graham, a canny stylist whose meticulous hand lies lightly on his players but guides them surely. And James Levine will be at the podium. There will be seven performances (in a house seating nearly 4,000), not just the four Copland predicted.

What the Met did not do, in its long-range planning, was to fund a telecast of the new opera. It will be heard on the regular Saturday-afternoon radio broadcast, which is better than nothing, but the permanent visual documentation would be a far likelier ticket to a flourishing afterlife. The price tag is a million dollars, and the race is on to capture the fancy of a new donor. One must hope it happens. However one judges the Met's accomplishments in the past quarter century, there is no project in which the company may take deeper or more legitimate pride than introducing *The Ghosts of Versailles*. □



Ruby and Tawny

Both kinds of port are worth getting to know

by Corby Kummer

DRINKING PORT, that oh-so-British custom, is newly popular in America. Sales of port have more than tripled in the past ten years, and port by the glass is appearing on many dessert-wine menus. A certain amount of this popularity can doubtless be traced to status-minded yuppies who came to admire the English rituals of buying, laying down, and

serving port. But that doesn't explain why so many people have taken to sipping a bit of port after dinner. Port is sweet and luscious without being cloying. It draws out and rounds off a cold evening, leaving the taste of a wine and the warmth of a cordial.

Port is sweeter and stronger than ordinary wines because it is fortified. The freshly crushed grapes that start it

off ferment less than half as long as grapes for most wines—just two or three days—and then neutral distilled grape spirits are added. The alcohol content of the spirits is so high that it kills the yeasts, which in normal fermentation would go on eating sugar in the grape juice. Thus port retains much more sugar than fully fermented wines, and its final alcohol content is nearly twice that of unfortified wine (20 percent, as opposed to 11 to 14 percent for most wines) and half to two thirds that of most liqueurs.

The English, who own many of the principal port houses in Portugal, where port was first made, created port as it is sold today. (Several other countries make good port, notably Australia.) England always had smoother relations with Portugal than with France; frequent political and trade conflicts led the English to renounce their beloved clarets (red Bordeaux) so often on grounds of patriotism that port became firmly implanted in English life.

In the tasting rooms of the "lodges" of Vila Nova de Gaia, a city next to Oporto, the city in northern Portugal that is port's namesake, the main port houses decide whether or not to "declare" a vintage. Declaring it means that they will cut short the time the wine ages in wood—to less than two years—and sell it at high prices to collectors, who will lay it down in their cellars to age in the bottle. Supposedly vintages are declared only when the wine is sure to become great with age. Certainly the winemaker is careful to declare a vintage only when he is confident that the wine will age notably. Vintages are generally declared about three times a decade; the most recent declared vintage is 1985. But a declaration is less the maker's imprimatur than his calculation of what the market will bear. In the past, great years went undeclared because shippers were still trying to sell stockpiles of the last vintage.

Aficionados wait a minimum of ten years, and usually fifteen, to crack open a bottle of vintage port. Some restaurants jump the gun and serve young vintages, such as 1985, which is considered extremely fine (the extraordinary vintages of the past thirty years are 1963 and 1977). Opening a bottle so early may be sacrilege, but the 1985 does taste awfully good already. It suffuses the mouth with fruit, and has the

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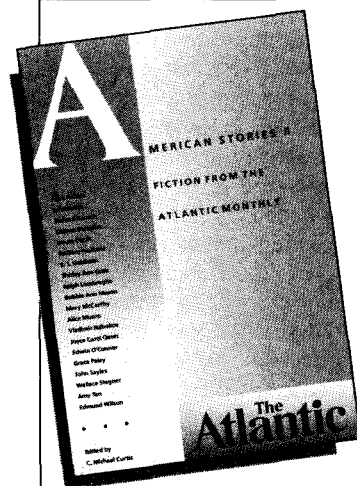
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depth charge found only in vintage port. Harvey Finkel, a wine writer in Boston, thinks that a good vintage requires thirty years, and says that he has stopped buying vintages later than 1977, because "I won't live to see them mature."

Vintage port is not only expensive, it's perishable. It has spent years in the bottle without any exposure to air (wine aged in wood is sturdier, because wood breathes), and once opened it loses its most delicate flavors quickly—diehards say by the next day, others say after a few weeks. The need for a bottle of vintage port to be consumed quickly is one reason why port proved so well suited to the large dinner parties of English lore. After dinner, once the ladies had withdrawn, the men would pass the port only to the left (explanations vary; the best is that it's easier that way if you're right-handed) and with a requisite alacrity. "Do you know the bishop of Norwich?" is one of those coded questions at which the English excel. This one is directed to the man to one's right who has failed to move the decanter along. If the subject is witless enough to answer, "Why, no," the reply is, "Splendid fellow—but he never passes the port!" Or the host might employ a round-bottomed decanter that can rest only in a stand he keeps beside him. It's this kind of behavior that can drive anyone to madeira.

PORTS FALL into two phyla, ruby and tawny. These are named for color, not flavor. (White port is also made, but it is usually far too sweet and bland. Current fashion is for ever-drier white ports—pointless, I think, when a good sherry is far more suitable.) Ruby port is a deep purple red. All vintage port is ruby port, but there are other styles of ruby port too. The primary flavor is intense, sweet fruit. Tawny port is aged in wood for enough years to give it a butterscotch color. Its flavors are more varied, and run to vanilla, caramel, and, appropriately, butterscotch.

There are several kinds of ruby and tawny port, and unfortunately labels are not always helpful (the most useful guide is the book *Port*, by Andrew Jefford). Bottles labeled simply "Fine Ruby" or "Rare Tawny" are the house workhorses—"fine" and "rare" have no recognized meaning. These basic



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blends seldom have much complexity or interest. The best way to tell them is by price: they usually cost less than \$12 to \$15 (for a full bottle, that is; many good ports are available in half bottles). If you want to taste the power and concentration of a vintage port, you're best off buying a glass in a restaurant, rather than committing yourself to a bottle in a wine shop. If you want to buy a bottle, try instead one of the many "premium" styles of ruby port made to emulate vintage port but bottled when they're ready to drink. They're much less expensive, and don't demand decades of patience.

A ready-to-drink port has the kind of stopper found in liqueur bottles. Bottles with stoppers should be stored upright, because alcohol erodes the glue that attaches the neatly cut cork to the cap. All vintage ports and some premium rubies have regular wine corks, which are a sign that the wine is meant to improve in the bottle; because the wine is unfiltered, it should be decanted. Decanting involves nothing more than leaving the bottle upright for a day or two, so that the sediment falls to the bottom, and then carefully pouring the wine into a pitcher or decanter, stopping as soon as you see any particles.

A very popular new type of premium ruby comes both filtered and unfiltered: "late bottled vintage." This is wine from a single year, shown on the label, aged in wood three to six years before being bottled (hence the name). The aging in wood, which exposes the wine to air, leaves the wine better able to withstand frequent opening and closing. A very few "traditional" LBVs are not filtered, but almost all are ready to drink as soon as they are bottled. Imports of LBVs into the United States have increased more than tenfold since 1982, according to Ronn Wiegand, the editor of the newsletter *Restaurant Wine*, and LBVs are also tremendously popular in England, since they cost half to two thirds as much as vintage port. They taste very good, too. LBVs have, according to the peculiar numerical ratings characteristic of wine writers, "40%-60% of the character and flavor" of vintage port, in Wiegand's estimation. I see what he means. They're lighter and less substantial than vintage port, but still have its sweet, fruity intensity.

Another good bet is a single *quinta*,

the Portuguese word for "estate." This style says "vintage port" on the label and gives a year. The only difference between this and a real vintage port is that the year was undeclared (you can't tell this part from the label, unsurprisingly: the industry also doesn't mind the implication that LBVs are vintage ports). "These wines can be better than many declared vintage ports," James Suckling says in his definitive guide, *Vintage Port*, and they cost less. Examples to look for are Quinta do Noval Vintage, Dow's Quinta da Bomfim, Fonseca-Guimaraens, Graham's Malvedos, and Taylor Fladgate Quinta de Vargellas.

The most popular premium rubies—"vintage character," which are blends of different years that have been aged in wood for five years on average—are not my favorites. These usually emphasize fruit and very little else. I find them inelegant crowd-pleasers. Among the most successful are Graham's Six Grapes (named for an old symbol on casks—all ports, including vintage ports, are blends of many kinds of grapes), Warre's Warrior, Fonseca's Bin 27, and Cockburn's Special Reserve. Dow's has just brought out a new entry, called AJS (the initials of the firm's founder), which it promises will have both strong fruit and the flavors of aging.

The ruby port I like most is, unfortunately, hard to find—"crusted" port, an odd name that alludes to the sediment, or crust, that unfiltered wine will throw in the bottle. Crusted ports are blends of several different years and vineyards that have already proved themselves to be good. Bottled after three or four years, they can be drunk straightaway, but will keep improving for five more years (sometimes crusted ports aren't even marketed until they have spent several years in the bottle). In crusted ports everything is done already for the impatient lover of vintage port. They're virtually guaranteed to be very good.

PORT REALLY comes into its own when it has been aged at least seven years in wood, which colors it—hence the name "tawny." The balance between fruit and flavors like caramel, toffee, nuts, and vanilla is what makes port unlike any other wine. The English started the craze for vintage port, perhaps because it re-

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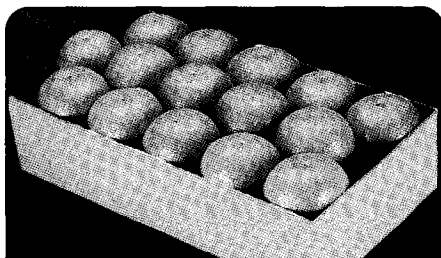
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minded them of a supercharged claret. But the French, who are now the world's greatest consumers of port, drink little vintage port; they serve tawny, chilled, before dinner. And tawny is the port that shippers and wine-makers themselves drink, because it shows their skill at blending. David Rosengarten, an editor of the newsletter *Wine & Food Companion*, says that when he visited Oporto, winemakers told him, "Vintage port is wine, but tawny is port." Tawny port lends itself to slow sipping, and is altogether more subtle than vintage port. It substitutes complexity for power.

Again, price is a fairly sure indicator of quality. Standard tawnies, which usually cost less than \$15, are often blends of red and white ports, and you don't want to waste time on them. One basic tawny does come highly recommended by the cheeky, useful newsletter *Companion Wine Review*: Krohn's "Rich Tawny," which costs around \$11, one of many Krohn ports that the editors are wild about.

The safest way to start sampling tawny port is to try an "age-indicated" blend. The blends, which average \$20 to \$40 a bottle, come in four indications: ten, twenty, thirty, and forty years old. These refer to the overall style of the many wines in the blend, not to its precise age. There is much controversy over which indication shows tawny port at its best. Each has its virtues, depending on whether you want fruit or caramel flavors at the fore.

My preferred balance is twenty-year-old tawny, and I was impressed by Graham's. Ten-year-old is often uninteresting, but Taylor Fladgate produces a much-admired exception to the rule, with both lively fruit and an edge of toffee that make it delicious. Dow's regards an average age of fifteen years as the ideal balance, and markets a fifteen-year-old tawny as Boardroom—a very drinkable wine with hints of spice and vanilla but with pronounced fruit, too. The thirty- and forty-year-old ports I tried were too mature for my taste, with mostly butterscotch and wood and very little fruit. The alcohol predominates too. A trick to dull it is to chill the bottle slightly, which in fact helps almost any tawny port.

A last style of tawny port is *colheita*, the word for "harvest," also called "reserve" port. The wines blended into a

colheita are taken from one year, as in single-*quinta* or LBV ruby port. But the blend is aged in wood for many years, usually more than the required seven. Then it is filtered and bottled and ready to drink. This long aging in wood makes the port tawny, not ruby; some wine merchants confuse dated reserves with vintage ports. The Dow's 1964 Reserve that I tried was my favorite of all the tawnies—soft and sweet, with a rich caramel flavor and fruit still showing through. It made me wish that anything more than a modest amount of port didn't give me a hangover.

PORT IS BEST in place of dessert, or with fresh fruit and nuts. Nuts and Stilton—the rich, blue-veined English cheese—are the classic accompaniments. Thomas Matthews, a senior editor of the *Wine Spectator*, thinks that port is the only plausible contender in the perennial sweepstakes for a wine that will go with chocolate. Try dark chocolate with a premium ruby or, as the *Wine & Food Companion* suggests, with a fruity young tawny port. Crème brûlée, or any dessert with a custard that isn't too sweet, preferably with a crust of melted brown sugar, brings out the caramel in an age-indicated tawny port. But nuts and cheese are still the ideal complements. Just when guests expect coffee and something sweet, you can try to usher them into the living room, where you've set out a big bowl of walnuts and a bottle of port you prize. They will be better disposed toward the idea if you've served only one wine at dinner.

You can decide if you prefer the grapy punch of a premium ruby port—blatantly displayed in one of the named vintage-character ports—or the balance of fruit and caramel in a ten- or twenty-year-old tawny port. My nominations for best wines at the best value in each category are a crusted port (if you can find one) or an LBV and a good tawny reserve, especially Dow's 1964. Taylor Fladgate's ten-year-old tawny is also an excellent way to start on tawny. Keep the bottle in the refrigerator after it is opened, taking ruby port out a day before you plan to serve it, and tawny an hour or so before. No matter how taken by port you become, don't ask anyone if he knows the bishop of Norwich. □

Books

Put the Blame on Mame

by Wendy Kaminer

BACKLASH: The Undeclared War Against American Women
by Susan Faludi.
Crown, \$24.00.

SHE'S A CASHMERE-sweater and camel's-hair-coat girl: no artificial fiber would dare to touch her perfect skin. She's an Ivory Soap girl, with barely styled brown hair falling thickly past her shoulders. Softly pretty and blankly self-assured, she's a tranquilizer: two clean and docile young boys flank her, stuck to her sides like magnets on a refrigerator. One has both arms wrapped fervently around her waist. The other leans into the pleats of her good wool skirt.

She's the New Traditionalist, star of a recent *Good Housekeeping* ad campaign and harbinger of what's supposed to be a trend. In the 1990s women will rediscover domesticity, according to *Good Housekeeping*. "Searching for something to believe in," the post-feminist woman will find "her husband, her children, her home," and last of all "herself." Kicking off the new "social movement" of full-time homemaking, Alan Waxenberg, the publisher of *Good Housekeeping*, offered this historical critique of late-twentieth-century American culture: the 1960s was the decade of "protest," the 1970s was the decade of "feminism," the 1980s was the decade of "yuppieism," and the 1990s will be the decade of the "new traditionalist."

It should be easy to dismiss anti-feminist fantasies (and puerile pronouncements on culture) like this, but they are taken quite seriously. Reactionary

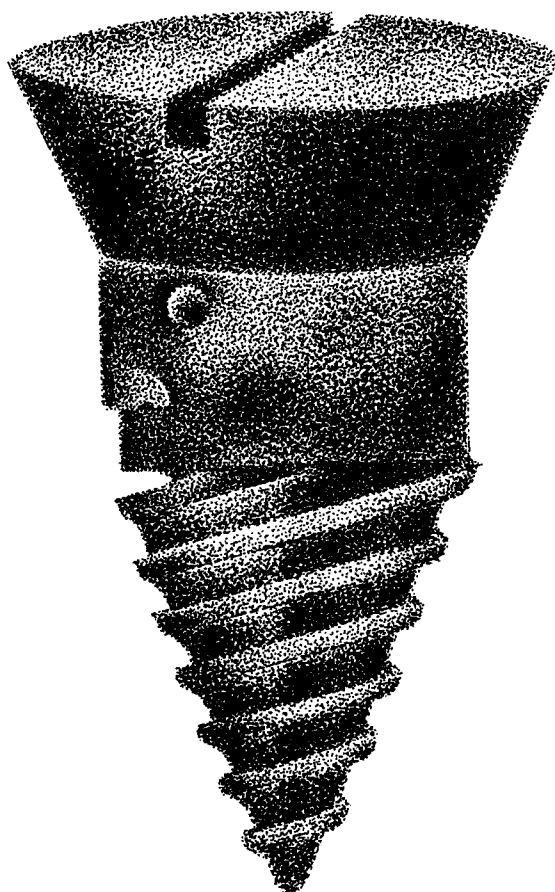
visions of femininity have displaced "factual reporting" on women's lives, Susan Faludi stresses in her comprehensive survey of a powerful ten-year backlash against feminism. Faludi, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, briskly exposes the conventional wisdom about women's dissatisfaction with equality and life outside the home as a collection of prejudices and myths.

The first myth, from which all others flowed, began circulating in the early 1980s (I originally heard it from the audience on *The Phil Donahue Show*). It goes something like this: the feminist movement is over, because equality has been achieved. To believe this you have to ignore a heaping lot of facts—about sexual violence and harassment, the wage gap, occupational segregation, the denial of reproductive choice to poor women, the disproportionate numbers of women in poverty, the disproportionate numbers of men

in Congress and the judiciary. (Approximately three quarters of all wage-earning women are clustered in lower-paying "women's jobs"; every six minutes a woman is raped; women make up only five percent of Congress.)

The problems these statistics represent have, of course, received some attention in the media—occasional articles about the "glass ceiling," the feminization of poverty, and the unequal treatment of women candidates, a few TV movies about rape victims and battered wives. But feminists who have continued to protest pervasive sex discrimination are likely to be dismissed as complainers. And they're said to be "out of touch" with the average American woman, which brings us to myth no. 2: Women today suffer from too much equality, not too little. The high-profile problems for women in the 1980s (middle-class problems all) were infertility, the stress of working outside the home, and the emptiness of professional life. The blame for virtually all these problems was put on feminism, which devolved from a promise to a threat.

Faludi, unabashed about her own feminism and commitment to equal rights, shows how these myths were perpetuated and exploited by the press, the fashion and film industries, the anti-abortion movement, cosmetic surgeons, right-wing ideologues-turned-authors (George Gilder and Allan Bloom), popular psychologists, the men's-movement guru Robert Bly, and a few revisionist feminists (Carol Gilligan, Lenore Weitzman, Sylvia Ann Hewlett). *Backlash* is more descriptive than analytic; Faludi doesn't argue the justice of equality so much as assume it, which will alienate readers (I suspect there are many) who believe that equality is unnatural and bad for women. But Faludi is a good journalist; her assertions about anti-feminist propaganda are thoroughly



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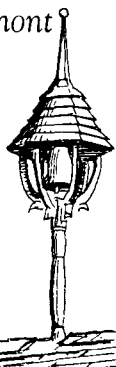
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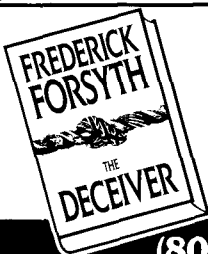
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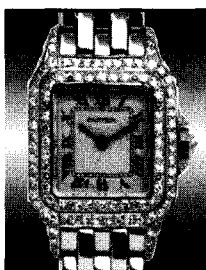
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substantiated. If you believe, as I do, that equality is good for women, and that traditional gender roles are mandated unfairly by culture, not nature, you'll find this book a valuable resource—an encyclopedic review of contemporary anti-feminism—and reading it you may feel less alone.

BEGINNING WITH a critique of the overpublicized 1986 Harvard-Yale study about the diminishing chances that single, educated, heterosexual women over thirty would find mates, Faludi debunks much popular wisdom about the ravages of feminism: the Harvard-Yale marriage findings were preliminary, readily discredited by other statisticians, and deleted from the final marriage study that was formally published three and a half years later. The preliminary findings, encouraging women to marry young, were front-page news; word of their retraction was buried and brief.

In the 1980s, Faludi asserts, “statistics on women stopped functioning as social barometers.” Instead of describing women’s behavior, they effectively prescribed it. The Reagan Administration pressured the Census Bureau into demonstrating “the rising threat of infertility, the physical and psychic risks lurking in abortion, the dark side of single parenthood, the ill effects of day care.” Bad news about feminism was heavily promoted by the press and rarely scrutinized, as Faludi demonstrates. The press portrayed the “post-feminist” professional woman as stressed-out and frustrated sexually and maternally. It helped create an “infertility epidemic” (there was little hard evidence of one), launching an infertility industry. It seized on questionable news about the dire effects of divorce reform on homemakers, perversely blaming feminists for the inevitable consequences of discrimination. The problems of displaced homemakers are hardly indictments of feminism; they’re indictments of the traditional division of labor at home and in the workplace (and of the dearth of day care), which denies women equal earning power and necessitated a feminist movement.

The scapegoating of feminism—the spread of the notion that women suffered from equality, not discrimination—was a product of what Faludi calls trend journalism. (It was trend

journalism that allowed *Good Housekeeping’s* publisher to anoint the 1990s as the decade of the “new traditionalist” with a completely straight face.) News accounts of women’s lives in the 1980s were marked by “the absence of real women,” Faludi asserts.

The press delivered the backlash to the public through a series of “trend stories,” articles that claimed to divine sweeping shifts in female social behavior while providing little in the way of evidence to support their generalizations.

Underlying Faludi’s occasionally familiar critique of anti-feminism is a powerful critique of the press.

Faludi is not a conspiracy theorist who believes that the press was part of some anti-feminist cabal; it was “just grossly susceptible to the prevailing political currents.” She also ascribes the shoddy reporting on feminism to laziness—journalists’ “propensity to repeat one another”—and to a concentration of ownership that encouraged the repetition of news items. The persuasiveness of thoughtless, unsubstantiated attacks on feminism was a tribute to the force of repetition, as Faludi observes. Saying that feminism was bad for women made it so, as long as you said it often. (“If we say it’s a quota bill, it’s a quota bill,” a Republican operative told *The New York Times* recently, explaining the President’s strategy on the civil-rights bill.)

Journalists created the new truths about feminism; Hollywood dramatized them. The independent, often unmarried heroines of the 1970s gave way to the frustrated career women of the 1980s who got their comeuppance in the anti-feminist *Fatal Attraction*. Faludi doesn’t predict fashions in femininity for the 1990s, but if *Thelma and Louise* and *Terminator 2* are indications of a trend, celluloid women may regain their independence with a vengeance. She does provide an entertaining and instructive report on the backlash of the 1980s in the movies and on TV, focusing on the misogynist sentiments of *Fatal Attraction’s* director, Adrian Lyne, its leading man, Michael Douglas, and other rich white guys who feel wounded by feminism. Douglas is “tired of feminists, sick of them. . . . Guys are going through a terrible crisis right now because of women’s unreasonable demands,” he laments. Marshall Hersko-

vitz, a co-creator of *thirtysomething*, agrees: "I think this is a terrible time to be a man, maybe the worst time in history," he whines. "Manhood has simply been devalued in recent years and doesn't carry much weight anymore."

Womanhood, however, carries no weight at all. It floats down fashion runways in tight, tiny skirts and baby-doll dresses. Faludi chronicles the emergence in the late 1980s of Christian Lacroix and other designers who promoted High Femininity—clinging, revealing fripperies and street-wear lingerie. Fashion designers claimed philosophically that they were doing women a favor: The "tailored look" damaged women "psychologically," Cher's favored designer, Bob Mackie, opined. "It hurt their femininity."

Women consumers did not agree, Faludi believes. She reports that the fashion industry lost money on High Femininity. It was a failure in the ready-to-wear market; it didn't suit women's lives at home or in the workplace. Informal evidence—what you see on the street and in stores—indicates that designers may finally have been more successful in marketing miniskirts than Faludi suggests. But their apparent willingness to suffer some financial losses in their High Femininity campaign is unsettling, revealing, as it does, an anti-feminist ideology that's stronger than greed.

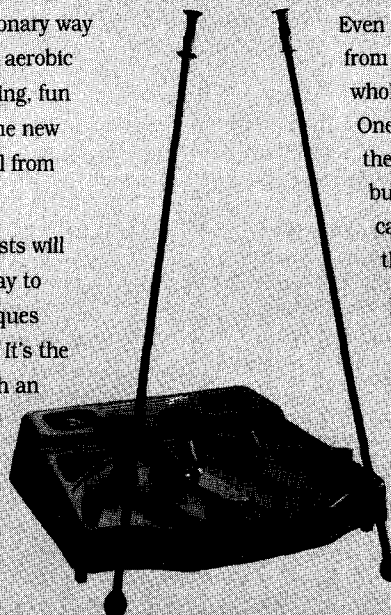
Not that anti-feminism isn't often profitable, as cosmetic surgeons can attest. Not that feminism isn't seen as a financial threat by men who fear losing their monopoly on higher-paying jobs. (Women's advances in employment in the 1970s helped trigger the backlash, as Faludi observes. Blue-collar workers whose earning power was being depleted by a failing economy were especially resentful of feminism.) But Faludi's report on the backlash implies that it is fueled not just by economics but by prejudice arising from a fierce emotional attachment to traditional gender roles and notions about natural gender differences. (Michael Douglas and Marshall Herskovitz can hardly be worried that women will take over their jobs.) The enormous popularity of Carol Gilligan's narrow, anecdotal, entirely unsubstantiated paean to women's "different voice" was evidence of a strong belief among women, too, in natural gender differences—that men and women differ not just

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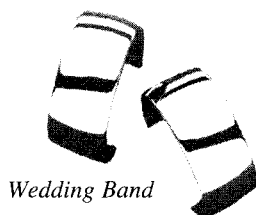
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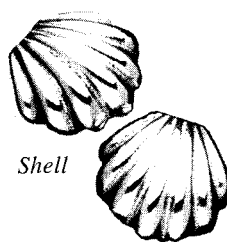
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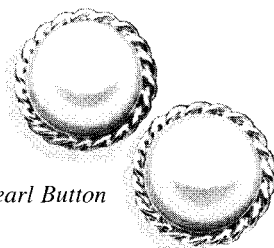
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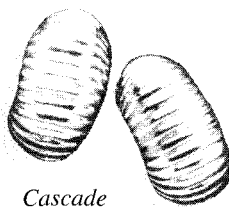
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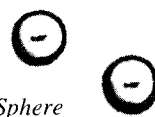
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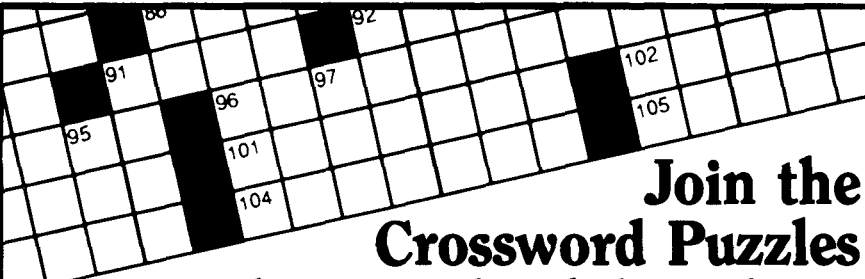
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biologically but in terms of character, temperament, and moral perspective. The anti-abortion movement exploits this belief in the primacy of women's maternal role and their nurturing, compassionate, "relational" proclivities. Reproductive choice is a covert economic threat to men (it expands education and employment options for women), but it also poses an identity crisis for women who define themselves as mothers first.

Faludi acknowledges the emotional appeal of anti-feminism, but she believes that it's limited among women. Relying on surveys that indicate women's strong support for an egalitarian feminist agenda, she suggests that backlash was foisted upon us by anti-feminist men (and their right-wing women's auxiliary). Women have been silenced and isolated by backlash, she says, not persuaded by it.

I'm hopeful she's right, but I'm not optimistic. Despite some evidence of a small gender gap, women help elect anti-feminist politicians. Women consume trend journalism, advice by self-appointed experts on "successful" femininity, and tributes to women's special (and superior) ways of knowing, relating, and resolving moral dilemmas. Women believed Clarence Thomas over Anita Hill by about a two-to-one margin, according to *The New York Times*, which reported no significant gender gap in support for the Thomas nomination. Feminism was easily sabotaged by the federal government and gatekeepers of the culture because it lacked the wholehearted support of its constituency. Feminists themselves are deeply divided over the fairness and feasibility of equality, and over strategies for achieving it. Feminists, too, are insecure about aging, gaining weight, and failing the tests of femininity.

Demographic changes and the need to integrate women fully into the civilian workplace and the military may eventually force equality on a recalcitrant public. Reaction to the probably imminent reversal of Supreme Court cases securing women's abortion rights may revitalize the feminist movement. Young women like Susan Faludi may continue the drive for equality with uncompromising confidence and verve. Meanwhile, according to a reliable source, some leading New York feminists are getting facelifts. □



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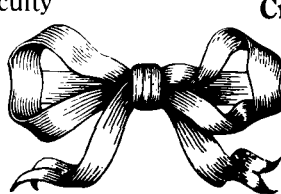
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Brief Reviews



EDGAR A. POE by *Kenneth Silverman*. HarperCollins, \$27.50. The subtitle of Mr. Silverman's biography of the nineteenth-century master of the macabre—"Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance"—summarizes the author's belief that Poe's addiction to tales set in an overlapping borderland between life and death arose from an inability to adjust to the early death of his mother. Mr. Silverman does not belabor this theory, nor does he demand that the reader accept it. There is a great deal more to Poe than "The Fall of the House of Usher," and the author covers all the territory thoroughly and well. Poe the debt-ridden undergraduate, the exasperating pseudo-son, the unexpectedly good soldier, the West Point disaster, the hand-to-mouth author, the savage reviewer and brilliant editor, the always-broke family man, the inventor of the detective story, the hack journalist, the erratically popular purveyor of fiction, poetry, and aesthetic theory, are all examined and presented in detail. There are also, of course, Poe the ineptly romantic widower, the possible drunkard, and the chronic borrower from other people's work who persistently and publicly charged Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with plagiarism. (To his fury, Longfellow ignored him.) As Mr. Silverman develops his information, a dim pattern emerges. It seems that Poe could always start, as he did in the military, with an enthusiasm and efficiency auguring a success that never arrived, because Poe, consciously or not, deflected it. There can be no certainty today what caused his behavior. Mr. Silverman's interpretation is as reasonable as any.

THE WEIGHT OF WINTER by *Cathie Pelletier*. Viking, \$21.95. This is Ms. Pelletier's third novel about the village of Mattagash, Maine, which was founded

by lumbermen who thought they were in Canada and which has been a bit out of kilter ever since. There is no shortage of action, both tragic and comic, in Mattagash, because the entire population is, through inbreeding or natural talent, a bit eccentric. The two local gossips are acidly drawn grotesques. The oldest living inhabitant, semi-conscious in the local nursing home, dreams lyrically of the past. The story begins with the first snowfall in early November and ends around Thanksgiving, by which time the prospect of months of low temperatures and high drifts has set off a fine series of explosions. Ms. Pelletier writes exceptionally well and handles her large cast of characters with skill.

MY WELL BALANCED LIFE ON A WOODEN LEG by *Al Capp*. John Daniel & Company, \$15.95. The creator of *Li'l Abner* wrote as amusingly as he drew, when he chose to change media. The pieces collected in this small book almost all have to do with social complications arising from Capp's early loss of a leg, and he describes them with insouciant good humor that never quite obscures an undercurrent of rage. The effect of this combination is wryly touching.

MARTHA by *Agnes de Mille*. Random House, \$30.00. Ms. de Mille's biography of Martha Graham should delight anyone with an interest in American modern dance, which Graham all but pioneered single-handed, or in lively, elegant, opinionated writing, which Ms. de Mille predictably supplies. She also supplies the direct view of one who worked in the same field at the same time and knew the same people. This is a fine period history of dance as well as an understanding portrayal of Graham's art and the life she dedicated to it. Dedication did not, by the way, require dullness.

WLT: A RADIO ROMANCE by *Garrison Keillor*. Viking, \$19.95. Mr. Keillor's novel ostensibly concerns the career of Francis With from North Dakota, a youth who attaches himself to a radio station in south Minneapolis. It is really about every sort of makeshift and disaster possible in the days when radio sharked up local talent and aired it without rehearsal. Mr. Keillor throws in old Scandinavian-immigrant jokes, burlesques of sentimental songs and

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What are the facts?

■ The concept of "land for peace" is a totally new one in the history of the world. It was formulated for one specific purpose only, namely to persuade and pressure Israel to give up territories that it has administered since the Six-Day War of 1967. By its victory in that war, Israel wound up in possession of these territories. Contrary to what many are led to believe, the "West Bank," the focus of today's attention, had never been part of any Arab country. It was part of Palestine, a territorial unit that, by the Mandate of the League of Nations and in line with the Balfour Declaration, had been designated as a national home for the Jewish people.

■ Thus, while the concept of "land for peace" is a brand-new one, the concept that to the victor belong the spoils is as old as history itself and had really never been questioned before the days of the Israel-Arab conflict. Our own country, of course, following its Manifest Destiny, has benefited greatly and has consolidated its territory by applying this motto. But Israel followed a different path. From the day of victory in 1967, it waited for an offer of peace from the Arabs. But that offer never came. Instead, immediately following the war, the Arabs pronounced their three unalterable "no's": no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.

■ In 1977, President Sadat of Egypt traveled to Jerusalem and presented a peace plan to the Israeli government. The Israelis eagerly embraced his suggestion. In exchange for peace and normalization of relations with its neighbor, Israel returned to Egypt the vast Sinai peninsula, together with the city of Yamit; some of the most advanced military installations in the world; the port and naval installations of Sharm-el-Sheik, which safeguard Israel's access to its port of Eilat;

and the oil fields that Israel had developed and which had made Israel self-sufficient in its energy requirements. And, of course, Israel also gave up the natural buffer against aggression that the Suez Canal and the strategic depth of the Sinai itself provided. It was a first in history. Never before in the chronicle of mankind had the victor returned conquered territory to the vanquished in order to attain peace.

■ One would expect that the concept of "land for peace" would work both ways. After all, should not the Arabs also make some territorial sacrifices for peace? Unfortunately, that is not the case. Every inch of land held by the Arabs is considered "holy Arab soil" and its possession by the "infidels" (Christians or Jews) is inadmissible, intolerable, a blasphemy and a case for "jihad" (holy war). No compromise, no concession is ever possible. The way the "Taba issue" was finally resolved further illustrates the Arab belief that the "land for peace" principle is basically a one-way street.

■ The "land for peace" formulation is now applied mostly to the Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza regions. Israel's foes, but also some of its friends, urge Israel to yield these regions to the Arabs, in exchange for "peace." But there is no peace, and no peace will come about by Israel's giving up this area of vital strategic importance to those who are its sworn enemies and who have declared over and over again that they wish to use this land as their launching pad for the final attempt at the destruction of Israel. The conflict in the area is not only between Israel and the "Palestinians." It is first of all between Israel and the Arab nations. With the single exception of Egypt, virtually all of them are still in a state of war with Israel.

To none of the Arab countries has the possibility ever occurred of *their* trading land for peace, for instance yielding the "West Bank" to Israel for the sake of peace. Not one of these countries has even hinted that they would make peace with Israel if Israel yielded the administered territories to the Arabs. There isn't even a gesture of accommodation, such as a lifting of the over 40-year-old Arab economic boycott against Israel, an apology for the odious slander that Zionism is Racism, or a discontinuation of the yearly charade in the United Nations, in which the Arab states attempt to expel Israel from that body. For the victor to yield land for peace to the vanquished is a new idea—who knows, it might even be a good one. But it surely would have to work both ways in order to be valid and effective.

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inane soap operas, and limericks somewhat deficient in rhyme and meter but serving the true purpose of the genre. They are, in short, dirty. One suspects that this satire includes everything Mr. Keillor ever yearned to broadcast on his own Lake Wobegon show—and discreetly omitted. The result is very amusing indeed.

THE FAÇADE: M.N.O.P.Q. by Libuše Mo-níková. Knopf, \$23.00. Apparently this novel from Czechoslovakia was written before the collapse of communism and the establishment of the country's independence, but it foreshadows both. The principal figures (four disorderly artists engaged in the restoration of frescoes at a Renaissance castle plus two young associates) provoke riot at home and, when cast adrift in Siberia, uproar abroad. The Soviet citizens involved are sinister but ineffectual, the Czechs rattle-witted but indomitable. Behind the comedy and fantasy of the action lurk an ironic view of national character and much actual history. The book is unusual and intriguing.

BANDIT by Vicki Hearne. HarperCollins, \$22.00. Ms. Hearne is an accomplished animal trainer. She is also a woman of many and violent prejudices. These elements coalesce in her account of her long legal battle to save Bandit, an allegedly dangerous pit bull, from Connecticut officials bent on putting him to death. The author despises petty bureaucrats, dog wardens, animal-rescue fanatics, racists, and anyone who cannot recognize a true pit bull—which Bandit is not. What with all these distractions and the deployment of a scholarly mind well stocked with everyone from Plato to Donald McCaig, the reader can lose track of Bandit's predicament for considerable distances. Ms. Hearne goes so far afield as to argue that a statue of Rome's Capitoline wolf really represents a pit bull—which does not necessarily mean that "civilization was founded in the composed, compassionate, steady heart of a pit bull." It can more easily mean that the sculptor could not hire a wolf to pose.

THE ASPIRIN WARS by Charles C. Mann and Mark L. Plummer. Knopf, \$25.00. This book grew out of an article that appeared in *The Atlantic*.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

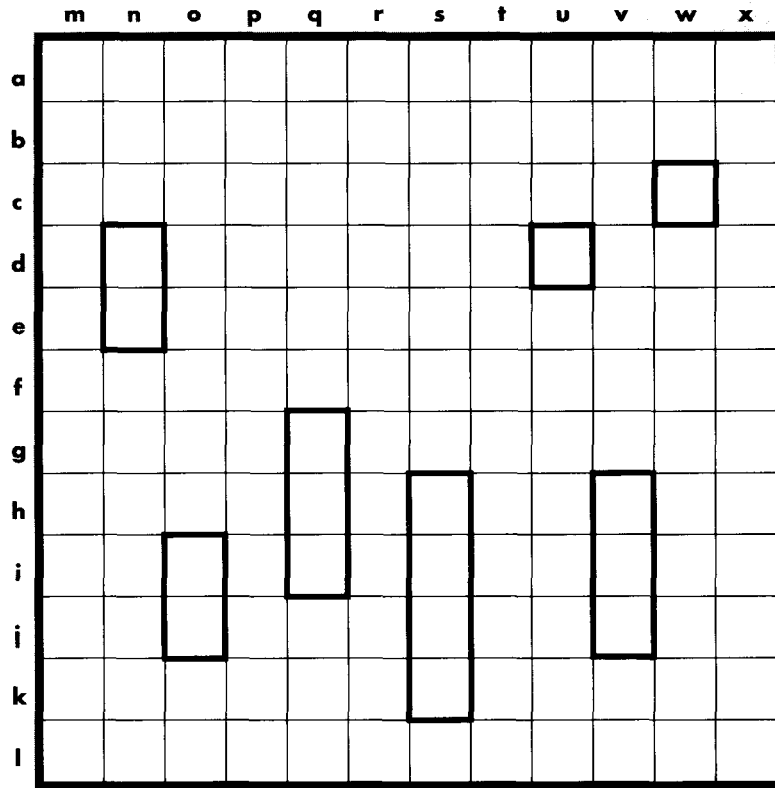
THE PUZZLER

BY EMILY COX AND HENRY RATHVON

BOXED SET

Among the answers in columns **m** through **x** are seven related unclued entries, each having one or more of its letters (not necessarily at the front) enclosed in a box. The boxed letters, when read box by box from left to right, will spell an apt message. Since normal bars are not given, solvers will need to determine where each answer fits within its designated row or column. Clues are listed in their proper order within each row and column. Answers include six proper words.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 118.



CLUES

- a. Extra message boxes show bargains (5)
Bird tagger gets behind baby eating end of worm (6)
- b. Instrument thoroughly inspected at the outset in deal (8)
- c. Sad condition of depression is keeping Texas town without one school (12)
- d. Playing blues, having a fit (6)
Note reverse of sensitivity in rich person (6) (*two words*)
- e. Fine spring (4)
Promise plum after passing exam (6)
- f. Fleming tails a blackguard from part of Canada (7)
One not working out around gym cheated (5)
- g. Some light fish (4)

- Large, eccentric English composer (5)
- h. Article hoarded by some young West Indians (6)
Small fruit gravity causes to fall (6)
- i. Examines container aboard ship (5)
Sheep goes after dog's first nip (4)
- j. Sense approval among four couples (8)
- k. Assist one in offense from the East (5)
Prophet adopting new, mean look (5)
- l. Gang associate leading our gang to kindergarten is a spineless creature (7)
Italian commune with branch in Pennsylvania (5)
- m. Common horseshoe found in tree (7)
With upset stomachs, felt dizzy (4)

- n. New Jersey town ignoring southeast faction (6)
- o. Copper and marble, with a yellow coat (7)
- p. Family tree almost covers one quarter of book (5)
S & L swallowing one's sole protection? (6)
- r. Drink tavern brought up is for French author (8)
Colors doesn't make it with audience (4)
- t. Bush is nothing new in commander-in-chief (8)
- u. Scale brute's back (6)
- v. To walk, lifted part of a boot (6) (*two words*)
- w. Song of colonist at border (6)
- x. Tried to put up with Mr. Williams (6)
Buddhist narrative skill American flips over (5)

NOTE: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 745 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

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WORD WATCH

BY ANNE H. SOUKHANOV

Chip Smith charge *noun*, a charge long read to deadlocked juries in Connecticut, asking the jurors to examine the opinions of their fellows with due regard and deference, the purpose being to persuade minority members to consider the majority opinion and thereby permit a verdict to be reached. Also called *Allen supplemental instruction*. "By then the deliberations had surpassed the previous Connecticut record of fifty-six hours. . . . [Judge] Schaller read . . . the *Chip Smith charge*, and the jury reconvened" (Arthur Herzog, *The Wood-Chipper Murder*). BACKGROUND: This term came to our attention recently in connection with the celebrated trial of a former airline pilot accused of killing his flight-attendant wife and disposing of the body with a wood-chipper. *The State v. James ("Chip") Smith* (1881) is the case from which the term *Chip Smith charge* is derived, but it was an earlier case, *Commonwealth v. Tuey* (1851), that inspired the *State v. Smith* judge to make the charge. In *Commonwealth v. Tuey* the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the trial court judge had properly instructed the deadlocked jury. His instructions read in part: "Although the verdict to which a juror agrees must of course be his own verdict, the result of his own convictions, and not a mere acquiescence in the conclusion of his fellows, yet, in order to bring twelve minds to a unanimous result, you must examine the questions submitted to you with candor, and with proper regard and deference to the opinions of each other." The *Smith* case, tried in the Superior Court for New Haven County, involved the first-degree gunshot murder of Daniel I. Hayes, the chief of police of Ansonia, by James "Chip" Smith. The jury, which had been deadlocked until the charge was read, handed down a guilty verdict. Fifteen years lat-

Here are a few of the words being tracked by the editors of The American Heritage Dictionary, published by Houghton Mifflin. A new word that exhibits sustained use may eventually make its way into the dictionary. The information below represents the first stage of research, not the final product.

er the validity of the *Chip Smith charge* was affirmed by the United States Supreme Court in *Allen v. United States* (1896).

edgy advertising *noun*, a nonconformist and risky approach to product promotion: "The . . . theme exploits and celebrates individuals and celebrities—people willing to stand by themselves. It's *edgy advertising*" (Bill Hamilton, in *Advertising Age*).

BACKGROUND: Our earliest citation for *edgy advertising* is the one above, from 1988; the term appeared again this year in a *New York Times* story, "Advertising's Antic Upstarts": "To do good work—Donnie Deutsch of the Deutsch agency calls it '*edgy advertising*'—means finding clients who will take risks." *Edgy advertising* is produced chiefly by small, aggressive agencies attempting

to build their reputations. Their clients are typically small companies unconstrained by corporate bureaucracy and willing to take gambles. "Other types of clients are often not welcome," the *Times* notes; in fact, such agencies sometimes fire clients. Presumably, *edgy advertising* derives at least in part from such idioms as *living on the edge* and *on the cutting edge*. It may also owe a debt to a nineteenth-century usage of the adjective *edgy*, employed to mean "full of keenness; eager."

Permaprose *trademark*, a paper laminate made from old design magazines, used in interior construction requiring moderate strength, absorption of vibration, or insulation: "And in what may become the most useful new material of the decade, Arthur Apissomian, a de-

signer in Wadena, Minn., recently invented *Permaprose*, a plywoodlike material derived from recycled design magazines" (*The New York Times*).

BACKGROUND: *Permaprose* can be used in constructing pedestals and pillars, as spacers and protective blocks, and in paneling and molding. It has multicolored stripes interspersed with lines of print. Apissomian describes the term as "a tongue-in-cheek reference to the deathless literary style of the design magazines."

smoking bed *noun, slang*, evidence of actual or alleged sexual misconduct by a public figure, widespread knowledge of which proves highly detrimental to the figure's career: "We thought all along a *smoking bed* would turn up," [Mike] Salster [a former Virginia Republican Party operative] said yesterday [of U.S. Senator Charles S. Robb]. 'He's going to develop a bad cough and be gone by 1994'" (*The [Lynchburg, Va.] News & Advance*).

BACKGROUND: *Smoking bed* refers to Robb's alleged affair with the former Miss Virginia, USA, Tai Collins. It is clearly a variation on *smoking gun*, a term meaning "a piece of evidence crucial to convicting an accused person," used in print in 1974 to describe the cover-up instructions contained in the infamous White House tape of June 23, 1972—the evidence that caused Richard M. Nixon to resign the presidency. A related term is *Hart Rule*: "Intense scrutiny of candidates' private lives is an unpleasant fact of life in politics today. [Republican John Buckley] propounded a *Hart Rule*, which goes like this: 'Anything any politician did with a woman other than his wife prior to May 5, 1987, ought to be allowed to go unrevealed. After Gary Hart's exposure, politicians were on notice that their behavior had to change'" (*The Roanoke [Va.] Times & World-News*).



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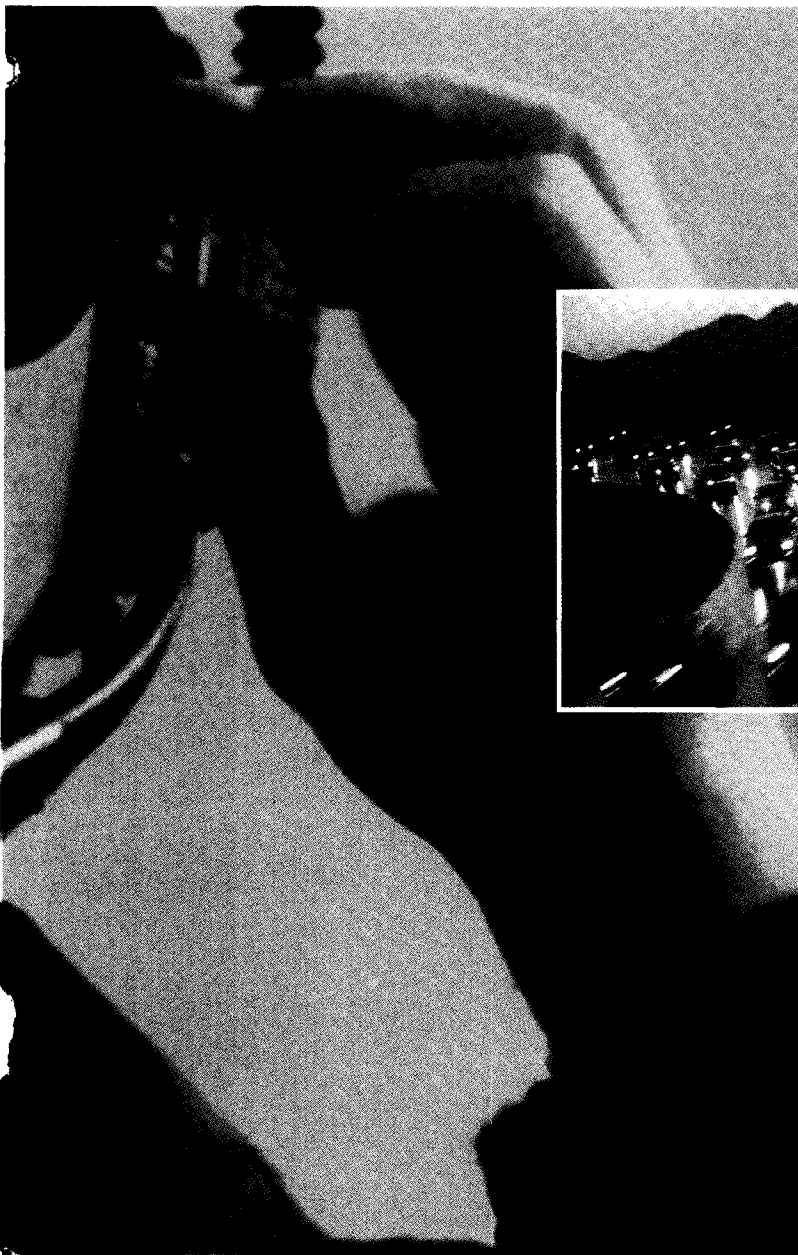
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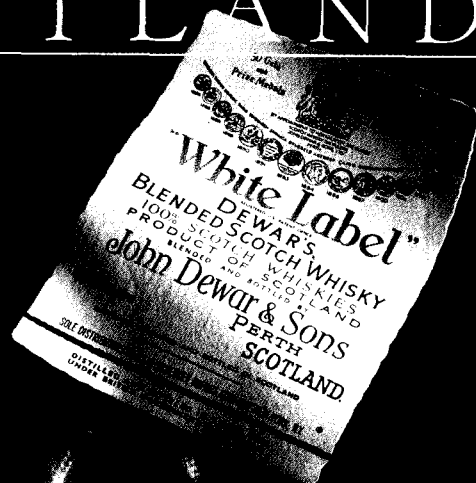
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